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THE
MAGNETISM OF CHRIST

A STUDY OF OUR LORD'S
MISSIONARY METHODS

BY THE

REV. JOHN SMITH, M.A., D.D.

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To

OUR STUDENTS

IN

GLASGOW, EDINBURGH, AND ABERDEEN

WHOSE RECEPTION

OF THIS OCCASIONAL SERVICE

MADE A BURDEN

A JOY

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INTRODUCTORY

THE WORLD INTO WHICH JESUS CAME

I

INTRODUCTORY

THE WORLD INTO WHICH JESUS CAME

In entering upon the occupation of this Lectureship, which bears the honoured name of the late Dr Duff and was really founded by him, I desire to associate myself with the principles which in the mind of this great missionary leader were conceived as underlying this institution. It is only the fragment of a wider plan which has not yet been realised. Being far in advance of his time, and discerning nearly forty years ago, a need which is becoming generally apparent to-day, he conceived the plan of a Missionary Institute, of whose manifold activities the lecturer on Evangelistic Theology would be the centre and head. He contemplated lay students, no less than those who were qualifying for ordination, being trained especially for foreign missionary service, and receiving a large part of this preparation at home before going out to their various fields.

There are most interesting associations of this lectureship with the life of the great-hearted founder, and with the history of the former Free Church, which are worthy of being mentioned. While passing through the theological classes in St Andrews, the thought occurred to Alexander Duff, that, to quote his own words, "throughout the whole course of his curriculum of four years not one single allusion was ever made to the subject of the world's evangelisation, the subject which constitutes the chief end of the Church on earth." Years after, when the tidings of the Disruption travelled out to India, the thought which had made so deep and even painful an impression on his heart in student days revived. This appeared to be the opportunity for which he had waited, and so he wrote to his "noble friend Dr Gordon" urging his plea, "that as the Free Church in her General Assembly had started as a Missionary Church, her new college should start as a Missionary College."

Not until twenty-three years after the Disruption, in 1866, had Dr Duff the pleasure of announcing to the General Assembly, that a few generous friends of missions had placed in his hands the sum of £10,000 as an endowment for this chair. And in due course—though quite contrary to his own original intention—he was called to be its first occupant, as Professor of Evangelistic Theology.

In the small volume (published in 1868, Elliot, Edinburgh) containing his Inaugural Address—with an attractive introduction—we find not only the interesting particulars which I have mentioned, but his elaborate sketch of the subjects and objects of the chair. He is successful in showing that the chair has a distinctive sphere of its own. After reviewing the subjects of the other chairs he defines the subject of his own thus: "It is Evangelic Theology viewed, not abstractly or speculatively as a science—but actively as a militant power, in its constant aggressive aspect and bearing towards spiritual ignorance, the false religions and superstitions of all peoples and nations." And again in referring to his own conduct of the chair, Dr Duff says, "at all events, one thing is certain that while I continue to occupy the chair, it will be my constant endeavour to lose no opportunity of recommending all Evangelical Missions—home and foreign, whether to Jew or Gentile—according to my own honest conviction of their respective magnitudes, or their relative claims based on general or specific grounds."

These last sentences have been of service to me both as indicating Dr Duff's mind, and in confirming my own judgment as to the right course to be pursued. In his mind the mission of the Church was one. Home and foreign were but departments of one great evangelic enterprise. And respect was to be had not only to the relative importance of these departments in themselves but also to the special exigencies of times and seasons. Being parts of a living whole they act and react incessantly. Home Missions have gained a wonderful impetus from the marvellous expansion of Foreign Missions. And again as at the present hour, we are compelled to feel that the crux of the whole problem lies at home. We must strengthen our base of operations, to maintain our outposts. Unless our Church can face and overpower the hostile forces at her door, and become a more pervasive and powerful factor at home, there must be—as was the case with declining Rome in relation to her provinces—feebleness and shrinking at the circumference of her missionary activities.

We are in the direct line of the originating idea of the founder of this chair when we take up, in special connection with Home Mission problems, the principles of all mission activity, as they are revealed in the teaching of Jesus.

One last reference to Dr Duff may be permitted in order to point out that he specially had regard to Home Mission operations carried on through the Church, and by or under the control of the ministry. "The twofold function of a minister in this nominally Christian land, is, as an evangelist, to seek and save the lost, and as a pastor, to nourish all who have been already recovered and found, in that holiness of heart and life, without which no one shall see the Lord in glory." And then the great orator draws a sharp character sketch worthy of being rescued from forgetfulness. "Many ministers there have been and still are of whom it may be truthfully said, that they seem to be converted men—even, in their own way, holy men, but men who, at the same time, unhappily carry about with them such an oppressive load of languor, listlessness, and *vis inertiae*, that they can only bestir themselves as they are bestirred. Ministers are there who live, or rather exist and vegetate, in very peculiar religious hothouses or greenhouses of their own, having about them some of the verdant hues of righteousness, but little or none of its nutritive fruits, and who seem as incapable of conveying any portion of their own little warmth or feeble vitality to dead or dying souls in the world without, as the sickly exotics of our ordinary hothouses or greenhouses, of dispersing heat or animation to the leafless, sapless trees, shrubs, and herbs that are shivering outside, exposed to the fury of the wintry blasts." Without raising the question whether it be descriptive of the present, this is a telling portrait of what was not uncommon in the past. And then the man of God bids us pray that we may never belong "to this nondescript order of a simply vegetating ministry."

Addressing those who are preparing for the regular ministry of the Church, our aim is to speak, not immediately of their preaching and administration and pastoral work among their own people, but of the larger ministry to which they and their people are in common called. No church liveth to itself. A generating centre of spiritual force, a church is to be judged by its influence on the surrounding world. If there be life within, there will be reflections of that life all around. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hid. Her people must reflect the ideals to which they are being conformed. Yea, living in God and having the Spirit of God living in her, each spiritual community must discover the spirit and power of the Cross reincarnated in her renewed lives. Ye are salt—antiseptic and stimulating influences to the whole world. Ye are light, by the light divine beaming afresh in specific human experiences, throwing the true light of life all round.

For this larger ministry I am bringing to you Jesus as your perfect example. As we shall see to-day in this opening lecture, Jesus laboured in as complex a situation as that which we occupy. There He lived and toiled as a home missionary, grappling with existing conditions, as we shall have. He came down to the actual facts of life among all sorts and conditions of men in his own land, as we shall have to do in our own time. But more, He did this immediate bit of work in Jewry with His eye on the future and the whole world. These were His first steps towards the founding of a kingdom in His sacrifice, and to be continued within those lines to the end.

Another thought is of importance. Because of His personal isolation through the hostility of the Jewish leaders of every name, Jesus stood free to determine from within the lines of His Kingdom. His life was not like that of most men, a compromise between an ideal and hard unyielding circumstances. What importance then are we to attach to every line of His teaching and practice. My aim accordingly, in the course of lectures with which I am charged, is to deal with the methods of Jesus in approaching and attracting men; and that we might get close to Him and, without the intervention of current ideas, as far as such a power of detachment is given to us, catch His mind and enter into the originality of His aims, I have made a study of the Gospels with these immediate ends in view. To exhaust them were impossible. From the limitless sea of their scope we have brought such treasures as our limited line could reach.

And now as introductory to the whole subject let us consider, in what remains of this lecture, the world into which Jesus came, and then the spirit in which He approached it. We are thinking of Jesus, as come into the world with a special mission, to seek out those by whom He is to found the Kingdom of God among men. What was the existing situation? What were his lines of action in that situation?

I. What was the existing situation? There can be no doubt that the surroundings of the life narrated in those Gospels were distinctly Jewish. The central movement of these stories is among the covenant people. True, the narrative is impinged upon not infrequently by heathen surroundings. The place of Christ's birth was indirectly determined by an imperial decree. His home in Nazareth, was chosen because of political circumstances arising out of the national subjection to Rome. Presumably He would in some sort be enrolled a Roman subject. From the hill above Nazareth, He could see every day through all the quiet years, the sea, the broad plain of Esdraelon, along which emissaries of imperial Rome would frequently travel, further south the great road which passed by Dothan, from Damascus and the far east, to Egypt and the Empires of the west. Between Him and Ebal on the southern horizon, scarcely distinguished among the huddle of lower hills was Herod's capital, Sebaste, on the site of Ahab's city of Samaria; and to the east, over the sunken area of the Galilean lake, rose eminences of Gilead out of the immeasurable Asiatic plains, while northwards Hermon marked the boundary of heathen Syria.

All the influences flowing from this continual outlook mingled with the thoughts of Christ from His earliest years. And that they were not alien or indifferent to Him, His whole after life showed. While as we shall presently see, He kept in His ministry within Jewish lines, He was not held by a sectarian spirit. He praised the faith of the centurion. He held back the Syrophenician woman from her desire, only until faith rose triumphant over every obstacle, and drew forth His unstinted response. The coming of the Greeks stirred His soul to the deeps. There was in Him that universal human spirit, or rather that central life in God, for which these barriers of race, religion, nationality did not in the deepest sense exist.

And yet the point for us to notice, is that He who came to save the world kept through all His active ministry the surrounding nations at the gate. He came unto His own. He lived for His chosen people. In the midst of a vast environing pagan civilisation, He made a spiritual idyl of the world's prime. The book of Ruth is not more fragrant of an open-air pastoral life. No book of the Old Testament is more full of covenant histories and hopes. As sweet springs in the salt sea, the Jewish spirit, quickened into new life by the luminous fulfilling thoughts of Christ, made room for itself amid that alien environment.

We can remember the unfeigned surprise with which, reading some years ago Schurer's "The Jewish People in the Times of Jesus Christ," we realised in how many directions the nation had become paganised. Dotted over the land were numerous Hellenistic towns. Even in the strictly Jewish region of Judea, Galilee, and Perea, there were a considerable minority of Greeks. Traces of heathen occupation everywhere abounded. Houses were built in western fashion, and Hellenic architecture met the eye not infrequently, even in the temple itself. Public baths, and inns on western models, were features of the social life. The coinage was largely Græco-Roman. Public games, which were so characteristic a feature of Grecian life, were held every fourth year, with the utmost splendour, in honour of Cæsar. Even in Jerusalem, the sacred city, a theatre was reared; while in a valley near by there was an amphitheatre. To a casual observer, the externals of life would be found as largely conformed to pagan ideals, as in any other outlying dependency of the empire.

Ambitious kings, however, like the great Herod, may impose an external form of civilisation which has no root in the popular heart, which the very genius of the nation revolts from as an alien yoke. In that early day, as in the vaster arena of present commerce, what rubs off angles, breaks down peculiarities of thought and feeling, creates communities of interest and pre-occupation and thought, is intercourse in business and common life. Many centuries before, the Phœnicians had created commerce along the Mediterranean border. But now, because of the Roman peace, there existed a vigorous trade throughout the empire. Palestine had contact with east and west. She exported her pickled fish and received sauce from Babylon, beer from Media, Cilician groats, Bithynian cheese, cotton fabrics from India, sandals from Laodicea, and hemp from Greece. And where business with its frequent complications enters, commercial law is sure to follow, so that courts would spring up and processes be carried through as in western towns.

And consequent on this meeting of business and professional men, a more or less cultured social life would ensue. Grecian and Roman models would provoke imitation in literature and in the arts. Palestinian writers were known beyond their own land before the time of Christ, numerous literati gave distinction to the courts of the Herods. And, supporting Roman authority, were soldiers from all corners of the empire, possibly from Gaul. And thus the illusion, of the guarded splendours of Rome, pervading the whole empire, would successfully be maintained.

Yet side by side with this busy external world was another, oh, so different! The apparent triumph of heathenism provoked many reactions. There were fierce zealots, almost beside themselves with rage at subjection to the Romans. There were multitudes who stood aloof from all compromise. And despite much corruption and intrigue in high places, the nation abode upon her ancient ground, the temple ministry continued, the great feasts were held, the rabbis taught in their schools, high priest followed high priest in presidency of the Sanhedrin. And while those in authority were far too often seared in heart and scarred with evil, under the shadow of their hoary institutions, many poor Simeons and Annas and Josephs and Elizabeths kept alive a spiritual faith.

It was into this world that Jesus came from his mountain eyrie in Nazareth "when he began to be about thirty years old." Even to a man of superb spiritual genius, it was a situation in which anything might be possible. All over the empire not only political but religious landmarks were being abolished. Surmounting a thousand barriers, attaining to an unexampled glory of dominion, rejoicing in wealth, refinement, security, influence, the civilised world, nevertheless, had wakened to a hunger unsatisfied. He who could fill that void, set up an attractive ideal which would quicken anew the pulses of desire, he who could bring even a clever devil's semblance of satisfaction might have that world for vassal. In this narrative we are dealing with world-forces, with a world-spirit who shrewdly saw what was possible to him, let him win a rare child of the sun like Jesus, with One who could take in the full compass of this nefarious aim, and bade it away.

II. See the line which Jesus took in this situation.

What varied lines of activity lay before Jesus in that day of world collapse, and opportunity for an incoming power! Think you, did He not know that He was face to face with the greatest—the central situation and turning point in the history of man. You cannot see the glory of the line which He took, unless you think of those which He set aside. In this connection we discern the extraordinary significance of the testing which he underwent at the entrance of His career. Without such a background of general conception we cannot discern the sweep and force of Satan's temptation in the life of Jesus, malignly magnificent, seeking to engage the whole world of His ideas and energies, yet entangle them in the snares of defeat. Thus had the same evil spirit used every hero soul of all the past, either baffling or diverting him from any real invasion of his usurped dominion. Thus does he meet Christ.

For us who have in us the spirit and passions of the race, who go half-way to meet the temptations of evil, there is nothing exactly corresponding to the experience of the Temptation in the life of Christ. By nature we make our stones bread, use every ounce of faculty for our own ends. Every one aims to be lord of his own world. And we would presume on the help of divine grace to carry our self-centred, self-advertising schemes through. That is the ground and base of the life which is natural to us all. In so far as we are in any degree different is by the overcoming power of a new life, thrusting forth yet never freeing us from the environing self, which gains on every flagging, but recedes on every revival of faith.

Christ lived wholly within the circuit of His Father's will, and naturally moved out into the whole sphere of His mission from the centre of the Father's will. Evil had to come from without, and in the semblance of superior good. And it did in a way which tested Jesus. World reputations were not uncommon. Literary men from Palestine had become known at Rome. And with a self-consciousness which we can only by fragments discern, He could see resources in Himself by which He might at once command the wonder, and arouse the devotion of the Roman world. Instead of toiling in a corner, He might have His name and teachings borne to the furthest bounds of civilisation. And all this He could genuinely employ in sacrifice for man, to realise the highest good.

Browning in Paracelsus sketches the very soul of this seeming unselfish ideal, as evil in its vile Egoism could set it forth:—

> "What oppressive joy was mine
> When life grew plain, and I first viewed the thronged,
> The everlasting concourse of mankind!
>
> . . . .
>
> And from the tumult in my breast this only
> Could I collect that I must henceforth die
> Or elevate myself far far above
> The gorgeous spectacle. I seemed to long
> At once to trample on yet save mankind,
> To make some unexampled sacrifice
> In their behalf, to wring some wondrous good
> From heaven or earth for them, to perish winning
> Eternal weal in the act: as who should dare
> Pluck out the angry thunder from its cloud,
> That, all its gathered flame discharged on him,
> No storm might threaten summer's azure sleep:
> Yet never to be mixed with men so much
> As to have part even in my own work, share
> In my own largess. Once the feat achieved
> I would withdraw from their officious praise,
> Would gently put aside their profuse thanks."[1]

Such was the kind of ideal which under the momentary spell of the prince of evil, glimmered before the eye of Christ. What multitudes of his reputed followers have drunk this potion of mandragora, the very quintessence of egoism, as if it were the wine of sacrifice. The Son condemns all this as sin in the flesh, and in His own person presents an ideal so infinitely far from anything which ever entered into a human mind that the record is authenticated by the brilliance of the content.

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[1] Part I., "Paracelsus Aspires."

The reader will have noticed that humility comes to a man as he mounts the heights of knowledge and vision. Echoes, retailers of other men's discoveries, are chock-full of self-sufficiency. It is Sir Isaac Newton who feels himself as a child picking up a pebble on the shore of an infinite ocean. It is Wordsworth who sings "Wisdom is ofttimes nearer when we stoop than when we soar." It is Christ who says, "He that becometh as a little child the same is great." And so what distinguishes Him from all others is simple obedience. Other men are marked by their achievements—victories, codes of law, poems, discoveries and inventions. He is marked by an absolute all embracing submission. I take these for the keys of His life. "I do nothing of myself." (John v. 19, viii. 28.) "I can of mine own self do nothing." (John v. 30.) Until we enter into that we have not got the key to Christ. We may sum up qualities, grow eloquent in painting traits, but the figure on our canvas is not the Christ who has won the world's heart.

If we are to follow Him, if His words are to ring through us, and the world to confess His charm, we must enter into this mystery of His absolute continuous submission. I call it a mystery, because this is a thing which of ourselves we never can enter into. To a grown man dealing with the facts of life, obedience is abhorrent. He wants to enquire, reason, speculate—in a word master the content of experience. In all this, however, he is only hugging his chain, glorying in his prison-house. By these exercises of the mind we can only know this iron world of law in the midst of which we live. We attain but to the weak and beggarly elements—to the shadows of the true. Christ's submission is not servitude, deference to tyrannical authority. At bottom, it is loyalty to right, to One in whom right is enthroned, subjection of the personality in search of perfect good, to Him who on these grounds has won the devotion of the soul. And as such, this is the one entrance into the kingdom of the personal Spirit, and of all holy spirits in and with Him.

Christ's submission which means nothingness on this side, means on the other, openness to the world of the unseen. It means letting this higher world reveal itself through and to us. The light must come down to us from a higher region than an ordinary human experience. Although when it comes, that light vindicates its reality to human experience, and establishes its essential truth in every individual and social sphere. And this lying open to God that He may discover Himself in us, and since in us, through us, is achieved through no single and perfunctory act of surrender. By what we call an act of total surrender we simply give God the right, recognise His claim to take full possession of us, to detach every faculty of our minds from merely terrene relations, and to raise our natures step by step, and power by power, into the circle of the Divine thought, that they may become engaged in the sequences of the Divine plan. Thirty years of such life with the Father lay behind the first act of His public ministry. And how far this had advanced even by His twelfth year, is seen in His pre-occupation with themes of religious import, and the astonishment of the doctors at the answers of His reverent and discerning mind.

Take in what this means—for we are at the centre of the whole theme. If the life and witness of Jesus Christ are to be reproduced in us, and men are to see God in us, and flock to His feet, we must grasp the meaning and quality of God's revelation in Christ as it affects us. God has been revealing Himself in all sorts of media. He has made every side of man the channel of an inflow from beyond of His personal glory. But now the personal God is discovering Himself, through a divine-human personality, taken up in ever deepening surrender into the divine being, that in Him as much as through Him, God may be seen. In sense, reason, the moral faculty, man is simply looking away at a God with whom he has affinity, but who is distant from and other than Him. In Israel there was a historical union of a people with God, without completed vital union. In Christ there was and is the living consciousness of perfect continuous oneness with the Father, living and working in and through Him. And in His ministers there must be, founded on renewal and grace, a oneness with God in the deeps of the individuality, realised by the Spirit, not only existent, but wrought out into an articulated harmony of mind and will, with the mind and will of God. Through a living, possessed personality in continual touch with the Divine, God touches man.

To come back after this detour—on the manward side, all this means obedience. A personality is a living consciousness, an unceasing will, a sum of unexpended energies: and communion means unceasing response to the outflow of the Divine life. God did not enunciate Himself in certain principles and then go to sleep. The divine enunciation of the programme, in the particular experience of every succeeding generation is dazzlingly wonderful as His programme itself. And so there is nothing for it but self-abasement, self-emptying, coming in the Spirit into the secret place and having His mind livingly made known now, in relation to specific opportunity. The two poles from which light freshly breaks on revelation, age by age, are the Spirit and opportunity. And in the contact of these, while we search the Word of God and the needs of man, we gain an outflashing of the very heart of the eternal. And so there is a depth and fulness in the wisdom of obedience which we only gradually learn to know. The line which divides the prostration of obedience with every sluice open to the inflow of Deity, from that which is not obedience, however pure and beautiful, is like the equatorial line written with no hand but involved in the very build of the planet.

That quality gives shape to our whole ministry. The closed soul derives his impressions from human ideas and influences, and produces in other minds human impressions of judgment and feeling. The open heart athrill with the Spirit, carries into every other open heart, a flash of the eternal will. About the former there will often be the more noise. Men can talk freely about what is normal and human. The fire which comes from God makes those uncomfortable who resist it, and those who receive it are busy with God, and have no time to think about the preacher.

In order that this conviction may take root within the reader, let him mark the large vicarious element (in a human sense) in all really creative work for God. The workers were with God in His covenant hand for men. Recall Abraham's intercession for Sodom, Moses' prolonged and marvellously instructive intercession on behalf of his people — Augustine's Confessions —especially his soaring from Manichaean error into full fellowship with God, Catherine of Siena's prayer life, St Francis's discoveries of his inner spirit in "The Little Flowers of St Francis," Fletcher of Madeley, David Brainerd, George Müller, David Livingstone. To show the full sweep of this personal subjection to God, allow me to make one extract from St Francis. "When as St Francis on a time abode in the house of Portiuncula, brother Masseo put this question—'I say why doth all the world come after thee, and why is it seen that all men long to see thee and hear thee and obey thee? Thou art not a man comely of form, thou art not of much wisdom, thou art not noble of birth: whence comes it that it is after thee that the whole world doth run?' Hearing this Saint Francis all overjoyed in Spirit lifting up his face unto heaven stood for a great while with his mind uplifted in God: anon returning to himself he knelt him down and rendered thanks and praises unto God: and then with great fervour of spirit turned to Brother Masseo and said—'Wilt thou know why after me that the whole world doth run?' This cometh unto me from the eyes of the most high God which behold at all times the evil and the good, for those most holy eyes have seen among sinners none more vile, none more lacking, no greater sinner than am I: wherefore to do the marvellous work the which He purposeth to do He hath not found upon the earth no creature more vile, and therefore hath He chosen me to confound the nobleness, and the greatness, and the strength, and the beauty, and wisdom of the world: to the intent that men may know that all virtue and goodness come from Him and not from the creature, and that no man may glory in himself.'"[1]

We have seen Christ's attitude in relation to the Father. Let me, in conclusion, briefly adduce His conception of the limited scope of His own mission. Beyond all question the author of the Epistle to the Hebrews has caught the central note, in that quotation of an old Psalm "Lo, I come to do Thy will, O God." (Heb. x. 7.) God was to be chief actor in the drama of His life and He was to follow in obedience. He had come, that God, through His filial obedience, might carry out His Divine purpose.

Yet there was nothing impressionist, accidental, unreasoning in such a life. The will He came to carry out was God's age-long, unbeginning, unending will, in the loftiest sphere of that will in which it touched man. This was one with all earlier stages and lower levels of God's purpose, and so He was at home in nature, the symbol or parable of His mission. He saturated His mind with the Old Testament, because in every part He found that same will springing up into fragmentary and temporary manifestation. And now in the fulness of time the Father will reveal Himself in His Son.

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[1] Chapter x. "The Little Flowers of St Francis," translated by Arnold. Dent, London.

For the special purposes of His mission Jesus had wonderful miraculous and prophetic powers. But this founding of the Divine kingdom was not to be a sheer expression of Omnipotence; from all the lower grounds of law and religion on which men stood, they were to be drawn upwards to that direct surrender and faith, by which entrance into the Kingdom of God was to be realised. One great part of this work then was to establish these connections, and make these preparations. That in ultimate issue His work would touch the whole world was a fact present to His consciousness, as we see in many expressions. But even with the knowledge of the pagan empires which had been before His eyes from infancy, He has no desire in an eclectic spirit to dig for foundations of His Kingdom there. He goes back into the life of His own people—to find there exclusively all the signs of special preparation for the kingdom of God. He had no love of Rabbinism, for one taste of it when he was twelve seems to have satisfied Him. But in the Scriptures, and in the living faith of humble Jews, He found those marchings of God in the past which were to culminate in His own mission.

With what devotion He threw Himself into this preparatory labour we have one incidental proof. We frequently hear and read of the influence of environment upon character; but a supremely great character moulds his environment. And so living in a semi-paganised Palestine, cognisant of those manifest signs which we have already described of heathen domination—by the loyalty of His soul, by His devotion to the immediate task of preparing the Jewish people, through the quickening of all that was deepest and truest in them, for the Kingdom of God, He so ignored what did not lie in the line of His purpose, that what blooms forever in these Gospels, is an open air life among Jewish men and women, children of the old covenant under new and strange conditions. His own illumining presence seems to detach every element in the nation with which He had affinity, to live around Him, and make a spiritual day ringed by its own brightness from the surrounding night.

It was a very narrow and lowly rôle, in a poor corner of the empire, among a despised race. Had

He imported His ideal into the west and established affinities with western thought, the world might have rung with His name. He had no sectarian exclusiveness. The heathen centurion was dear to Him. The visit of the Greeks discovered His deep desire to draw all men unto Him. But this was God's work, and it was His to toil along the line of God's will, obeying from moment to moment, secure that along this line the purpose of God would best be done.

THE METHODS OF JESUS

THE EARLIEST MOVEMENTS OF HIS MINISTRY

II

THE METHODS OF JESUS

THE EARLIEST MOVEMENTS OF HIS MINISTRY

We have seen the situation into which Jesus came to take up His Home Mission preparatory to His founding of the world-wide Kingdom of God, the solitary spirit of submission to the Father in which He entered on that work, and the narrow and circumscribed rôle which He chose for Himself in leading Israel forward to the realisation of the divine will. To-day we describe in relation, His earliest movements, in getting into line with the people, and beginning to exert His influence on them.

Every step in such a progress is of intense interest. Most of us are conditioned by the circumstances into the midst of which we come. We are officials of organisations, taken in hand guided and controlled, from an early stage. Jesus was entirely free. He stood apart from every established institution, free to move from within, labelled by no party name, avowedly an exceptional and original person in the life of Israel. Not that He was either a sectary or a separatist. In the belief of John Baptist and of many besides He had His place in the organism of Israel, and that the highest, the promised Messiah. That however, in no wise affects, indeed heightens the consideration which we are now pressing, that every movement of Christ in beginning His ministry—so far from being accidental—partakes of the essence of His ministry, and is to be studied with reverence.

Permit one further consideration. The dawning of a consecrated ministry—the human getting into hands with the divine, the divine establishing itself in the human—is always an anxious time—with human workers full of shifting, and conflict, and unrest, false starts coming in before the true. How was John Knox tossed from place to place—England, Geneva, Frankfort, before he settled to his life's work in Scotland! Through how many vicissitudes John Wesley had to pass, at college, in Georgia, with the Moravians, before he struck into the path of service in which God worked so wonderfully by his hand. Livingstone was kept on the stretch of anxiety, hoping, fearing regarding China, until in a kind of despair he found his sphere in Africa. Moody tried many forms of service in his own land, before God took him across the Atlantic and gave him his place of world-influence first in Edinburgh. God is founding a world kingdom, and having tried and proved His servants, calls them and gives them their place by His own sovereign hand. This formative and preparatory stage in the life of Jesus is our immediate task.

That there is another and a divine side in the events which we are rapidly to pass over, and that there are deeper meanings and fitnesses than those which we suggest, is to us matter of certainty. We desire to individualise the man Jesus, entering on His work, as any great home missionary might; and to note His acts, and the incidents which marked this opening chapter, in their bearing on the preparations for a missionary career.

I. He attaches Himself to the most vital movement of the time. This new Leader was looking out for reality—in which there was a touch and impress of the Divine. With insatiate hunger and eagerness as the Holy Child, he became lost to the sense of time conversing with the doctors. But it is noticeable he never went thither again. He continued to recognise the religious institutions of the land as appointed by God, but He felt no attachment to the leaders and representatives of religion. He went "from Galilee to Jordan unto John to be baptized of him" (Mat. iii. 13).

In all this there was no discipleship, or union of forces. Rather, since Jesus kept so strictly

His own ground, and followed His own line, He must have been conscious of limitation and difference of standpoint in the Baptist. Yet for a Son who lives in the eye of the Father, and who is devoting Himself to bringing men to God and God to men, the main point is not confessional agreement, but to get into line with men in whom the spirit and power of God are. If He is giving His grace to such, they have an end to serve in the evolution of His kingdom. Christ followed a holy instinct in all this. And if we would be used of God, if we would have God come into us and work His convincing, converting, sanctifying work through us, we must have an eye for every movement of His power in contemporary christendom. Your little bit of work and mine is not some isolated service which we can take up without any thought of the great march of events. God comes into you to relate you to His world-purpose, and by you to fulfil some fragment of His saving design. As truly as Isaiah or Paul was a man of destiny fitting into an emergency, and fulfilling an end of God, shall you and I in our lesser place and on our commoner level be. All through this lecture it will be seen how much hangs on keeping close to God, moving only from these high instincts, which He kindles and sustains, and step by step as He leads.

But there was a further noticeable element in the identification of Christ, not only with John Baptist but with the earnest souls whom He committed to a life of righteous endeavour. Think what these must have been, a most promiscuous assemblage, Pharisees, Sadducees, Zealots, every sect and class of Jew from the Dispersion as well as Jewry, each a type of others, aroused yet wavering, drawn but not decided. Whatever we may call that crowd, and opinions will differ now as then, in that class was to be found the most earnest movement Godward in the whole population. And Jesus identified Himself with that.

When you begin to work in any district round your church, your primary difficulty will be to come into line, with all the earnest spirits in whom, under one form or another, there is an appetency for good. We have no John Baptist just now—no national theocratic conscience, to draw out of all nooks and corners of individual standpoint, the souls open to the light, and form them into a whole. We often work among little coteries of passive souls more readily subject to our influence, while stronger characters are spending themselves on subsidiary tasks, social reform, politics, rights of man, and so forth, fancying themselves against us, because they are not with us. While really, if we had the magnetic touch we would make evident to the dullest that we were with and for them and not against.

And now from an objective human standpoint notice the manner of Christ's identification. He sought to stand on a level with John's disciples and took their baptism. True, His standpoint and theirs was a whole hemisphere apart, but there was a peculiar appositeness in that common act by one who was so far removed from them. As having the higher light He stood in their place, not only with them but for them. To-day, we do not travel to the issue of His mission to see all that that implies, but are simply in human fashion studying how He entered on it. He believed that He could only win by sympathy, and understanding even the limitations of their view.

There is a great work to be done at this point in our day. We cannot presume on being fully understood in our higher Christian aims, by many who in something of Christ's spirit are working for the good of men. Christ is welcomed at all frontiers,—but we, who carry on our backs the burden of the Church's defects and sins, will find impalpable atmospheres of dislike, hostile judgments, suspicions, unfair aspersions investing us, and blighting with failure our efforts to win their confidence and sympathy. And yet all that mass of hostility to the Church is not to be put down to the corruption of the human heart. These persons have shrewd enough criticisms to press, serious blots to point out. Honestly enough, many are bowing down to ideals of some kind, yet out of sympathy with organised church life and outstanding forms of evangelistic effort. The wise worker for souls will take some means of showing that he is in spirit with them, committed even more than they are committed for right and truth.

This getting into line with all the elements in a population who have been turning Godward, and undergoing any measure of secret preparation for further search, is in our modern civilisation, a very difficult yet a most necessary work. The one thing that Satan cannot imitate, and the human heart cannot resist, is helpful love, chiming in with real human need. If we meet men in that spirit, we will attract to us earnest souls, across a hundred barriers of divergent creed and hostile standpoint. And we shall win from our Father that spiritual touch which opens the hearts of men. Is it not significant to notice that while in this act of brotherliness getting into line with men, a visible dower fell upon Christ from heaven? The Holy Ghost came upon Him and the voice rang out "this is my beloved son in whom I am well pleased" (Mat. iii. 17). So, myriads of times, has a witness from God come down upon men and women, just as they were getting into helpful touch with their fellows—upon medical missionaries, upon heroic souls who have stood with and for the masses of our people, upon a Henry Drummond, who made the student mind and student needs his own.

II. He starts in His ministry from the standpoint of John. At this point I confess frankly that there are some difficulties in piecing the fragmentary notices of this earliest period of His ministry. I do not mean in determining what passages belong to it, for regarding that most authorities are agreed, but in relating His activities within these months into a continuous whole. We can only argue for our presentation what inherent verisimilitude it may have in your view.

As regards the form of Jesus' ministry, Matthew asserts as true, even for a later period, that Jesus began to preach and to say, "Repent ye for the Kingdom of heaven is at hand" (Matt. iv. 17).

In His very enunciation of John's message, however, Jesus soon discovered how far He stood apart from the limited Old Testament standpoint of John. The Baptist occupied Old Testament ground. He would revive the moral intensity, and the vision of God, characteristic of the best periods of the prophetic age. Where he advanced beyond them in personal appeal, in the rousing of the individual conscience, in his sense of the inevitableness of moral principle, and searching divine holiness, arose from his new and irresistible conviction of Messiah as just at hand, and his realisation of the wonderful power of the divine Spirit, by whom every soul would be searched as by the fire of God. Without the Kingdom, he spoke as a herald, feeling it to be at the door. He roused men by his moral intensity to brace themselves up for that great event.

Jesus stood within the Kingdom. The content of the new conception was within His mind. He was moving on from within to unfold from within the riches of the New Testament ideal. To Him it grew to be of less and less importance, to bind His followers by the vow of baptism to a mere resolve of penitence. He rather sought to bring them within the liberty and vision of the new Kingdom, to be held fast by the inherent attractions of the truth, and the magnetism of love. Mere moral impressions were transient, vows under the pressure of these were simply human constraints until something better appeared. As John himself saw, what Jesus aspired to achieve was something infinitely deeper—with the discovery of God's perfect counsel, to bring in a divine power, and the renewal and indwelling of a divine Spirit, to keep those who could not keep themselves. The Kingdom of heaven—in which heaven should actually come down to earth, and man be actually united to God—this Kingdom is at hand.

From the beginning, this new wonder, these wider horizons, this richer content marked the thought of Jesus. Indeed as recorded in the Johannine narrative, the announcement of the Baptist became so explicit that even if Christ's own mind had not been full of His mission, He would have been urged on to this higher plane. All unwittingly, the Jews by their deputation (John iii. 27), urged John to this, who, conscious of his mediate and temporary function, announced the actual presence of Messiah. Coming up from the Temptation, Jesus found that John's message had expanded. Not only was He pointed out as Messiah, but His function was more distinctly described. Not only was the dawning of the Kingdom to be the coming of an era of searching moral judgment, with a fall to many; but out of this was to burst an era of salvation. John could find no analogy in the past, but in the emancipation from the bondage of Egypt. And Jesus was to be the Lamb of God, through whose sacrifice they were, not only to be sheltered, but to pass out into new fellowship with God. He saw a new day of increase and advance, and Jesus the soul and centre of all. He himself, his name and work would dwindle into a forgotten past.

Do not let us minimise this. Do not let the doctrine of a merely natural development lead us to alter the accents of this narrative. We must not find the analogies for John's prophetic anticipation of the atoning mission of Christ in physical and biological science, but in the region of human personality. In a great discoverer like Columbus, it is the whole project, the ideal in large and general import, which comes first, kindling passion, firing endeavour, and from that higher plane he descends to mediate stages and details. This is true to spiritual fact; and also to the circumstance that John's only followers who have left a mark on history, should have turned at once from the setting to the rising sun.

In all this we have the profoundest teaching for ourselves. When we commit ourselves to God and with all humility of soul take the line in which according to His providential indications we may glorify Him, we are committed to the forces of history, both adverse and favourable, which work in the hand of the Sovereign Disposer to issues which we cannot foresee. In every great confessor's life the moulding of external forces is as manifest as in this passage of the life of Jesus. We speak of men of destiny but none are more fully so than those who are in the hand of God for the redemption of men.

III. He takes His first step towards founding the Kingdom in the choice of elect men. John had disciples but they were the mere echoes of his influence, fired with his fire, and disappearing so far as positive testimony goes, with the dying down and cessation of his ministry. Christ chose personalities in whom His Kingdom would live and grow. As Professor Bruce with admirable insight discerned, His ministry was largely a "training of the twelve." Jesus grappled with individual men and bound them to Himself with resistless force. Let us make much of individual personalities. One man is not as good as another. There are men worth millions. And lower than these, there are lowly souls, incapable of sublime initiative, who have an absorptive power for human influence which raises them, in immediate results, almost to the level of their leaders. St Francis who stands alone in Christendom for the swift and profound impression of his ministry all over Europe, had his brothers Bernard, and Leo, and Giles, and Elias, and Silvester, and noble sister Clare. John Wesley, the founder of one of the largest religious bodies in the world, had John Nelson, and John Oliver, and Pawson, Mather, Thomas Oliver, John Haime, Sampson Staniforth and many others. We must remember that we are helping to extend a Kingdom which is to stand and grow, mediately through the force of human characters, who, in gathering in the elect have to exhibit as perfectly as possible through their own individualities the Christian ideal, and permeate every human interest and activity with His Spirit.

A profound interest attaches to the first informal choice of disciples recorded in John i. 35-51. This at least is no idealism, but history, with every vivid detail fresh in the writer's mind, showing that he had taken a profound interest in the events as they transpired, and that they had lived among his most sacred recollections. Nothing exactly like this selection had ever been made in the world before. Round great seers, schools of the prophets had gathered in Israel, the Greek philosophers and sophists founded academies from which came forth noble disciples, perpetuating and even extending the influence of their parent philosophies. But Jesus is choosing men who, receiving His message and fertilised by His grace should yield their whole individuality to its influence; become illumined and transfigured by their experiences; conceive the new life which they have found, from their own standpoint and with their own special gifts, pouring its energies through the floodgates of their own characteristic energies, and so become types and teachers within the Kingdom of God, creating special waves of influence and exerting their own peculiar magnetism. No one honours human personality as our Lord who subjects it wholly to Himself. Take two of these five disciples selected by Christ, and realise what they stand for in the Kingdom of God—practical, tender Peter and that serene and far reaching mystic John.

Let us come closer to the record. The reader will find here a masterly study of human types, and much insight into the rare and subtle attractions of Christ's personality. In our evangelism we have machine methods, which in experience have been found to meet the needs of many. They are imperfect, however, even as regards those whom they influence, letting many run through their meshes back into the world, and there are vast numbers whom they repel. True, we must not represent these wholesale methods as if they were inadmissible, for the thousands on the day of Pentecost and subsequently, must have been dealt with and admitted to the Church by somewhat analogous means. Neither must we overlook, however, the slower and more selective methods of our Lord.

Jesus made no overtures to the most distinguished pair of these five, Andrew and John. They approached Him, and, when eager to attach themselves they said, "Master where dwellest Thou?" He only replied, "come and see" (John i. 38, 39). Some men are not to be driven or even very obtrusively drawn. Leave them room unfettered to make up their own minds. You cannot tell what may determine them, not an argument possibly or an appeal, but something they have seen—some grace or trait. "Whence hath this man the balm that brightens all?" More men than we imagine are working away from their own centre at the problem of their own lives. They have their own findings, such as they are—not capable of expression in theological language mayhap, but valuable for them, and they do not want us to intrude. If we show sympathy in our common relations, a tolerant and tender respect for others, a ready helpful disposition wherever they are open to receive it, the shy spirit of the self-respecting man will discover itself, and we may not know for long what in us has won him.

The first sign Jesus got, that He had gained Andrew, was his bringing his brother. A great many human beings live in others. They are always thinking how this or that will affect those whom they love. Andrew listened with all his ears, not making much of his own joy, but saying, "This is the very thing for my clever brother, Peter. I know this will fetch and satisfy him." There are a greater number than we imagine, even among the strong men of the world, more open to the tie of blood, the touch of a kinsman's love, than all other influences. You do not know men if you do not know that. Leave some room for the working of natural affections and bonds. Andrew, with the glow of a new love irradiating all his countenance, was a far better apostle to Simon in his distraught mood, than mayhap Christ Himself. They had played as boys, wrought on the same net. And now Andrew had found what Simon still lacked.

I am not enlarging for picturesque effect. Every one of these touches has value for my theme. Matthew Henry says somewhere that in trying to give a man a new nature we should not stir up his ill-nature. If we are to spend our lives playing on human nature in the interests of the Kingdom of God we must give ourselves to the understanding of human nature. I notice among young preachers a strong tendency to take their illustrations from current fiction. But let us remember there are whole regions of the soul, that are not so much as touched by the great masters of fiction. They work on the common human level, far too often they appeal to the coarser passions and motives of the human soul, and when they touch higher phases of feeling they are always limited by the strictly personal goal to which the story is moving on. The only imaginative writers whom I have found deeply interpretative for the ethical and spiritual regions of man as they look out to God, have been Shakespeare in his interpretation of conscience, Browning in his optimism. Both throw down the shadow of God on life and the soul, and not merely, like so many others, enrich the thought of the world by deep sea soundings in the regions of our present experience.

Give yourselves then to the study in biographies, diaries, and the literature of meditation, of the more exalted regions of the human soul. Take a dip at least into natural mysticism—as by distinction we may term it—in order to realise the appetencies for God lying latent or unexpressed in human nature. Study the various schools of Christian mysticism — in order to gain some adequate impression of the depth and range of that region in the human personality, which responds to the appeal of the Divine. Inge's recent Bampton Lecture on Christian mysticism will form a suitable introduction to the really vast territory, and suggest profitable lines of study. By no means, however, confine yourselves to these. Christianity is not alone for those who have natural affinities with the spiritual. Study the lives and self-revelations of all great natures of whatever bent, speculative, intellectual, administrative, practical, who have been mastered by the Gospel of Christ, Augustine's Confessions, marvellous in self-discovery, in the conflict of the mind with subtle Manichean error, and uprise into the fulness and liberty of the Catholic faith; the struggles of great soldiers like Cromwell, of state-builders like William Penn, subtle thinkers like Jonathan Edwards, martyrs for principle like John Woolman, philanthropists like George Müller, reformers like Josephine Butler, missionary explorers like Livingstone—and above all, the matchless biographies of Scripture. You cannot master men unless you explore to them the depths of their spirits, and hold up before the eye of the soul a picture of its indefeasible possibilities and quenchless aspirations. The miserable fumbling at the mere outside of man, characteristic of so much modern preaching, is doomed to failure. As a strong soul said to me after a brilliant display in that line, "that man has no message for me," so do all true seekers turn from the ablest and best who have not a revealing message from God to the inward man.

But let us return, and, in Christ's dealing with Simon, let us watch, on the part of Christ, another marvel of intuitive discernment and resistless attraction. With the bulk of men the personal equation is supreme. Ever and anon, however, we find ideal souls in whom the personal is thrown into the background. They have a scent for the whole, an instinct for God. Their burden is their conscious detachment from positive good, their warfare, the marshalling and bringing into due subjection and concord, of the tumultuous forces of their souls. They belong to whoever can interpret them to themselves. Tradition, machine-made formulæ are nothing to them. Their burden is this new God's fact of themselves, this life which is in their hands, to make or mar, related to this mysterious universe in which may be found ghastliest failure or most glorious success. What are all your hearsays, and questionings of the mind, and established opinions to this?

See how Christ can deal with a soul like that. "Thou art Simon, Son of Jona"—thy father's son—not yet known for aught in thyself, hereditary elements at war in thee, movement enough, confusion and unrest, but no ripening as yet, much less positive product. Christ had read the soul of Peter, the shame and burden of a foiled heart, burning to express its conscious energy in intense action. And then, on the back of the humbling self-revelation came the ideal satisfaction, drawing every atom of him into the focus of faith. "Thou shalt be called Cephas"—rock; out of the chaos shall come unity, consistency, strength, endurance, standing for something positive in the universe of God,—on whose adamant confession other men may build to time's latest age.

Surely He who can speak so, deserves the leadership of humanity. How much we have to learn before we can presume to talk of dealing with human souls? And now for two tempering lessons. Note the catholicity of Jesus. Because His kingdom was of and for man, He needed all sorts of ministers. And He who had bound a Peter to Himself, attaches a Philip—a forthright, direct nature, incapable of introspection, with a brisk objective outlook on life, and a power of attaching and influencing men. He yielded to the immediate impression, and obeyed Christ's command docilely as a child. Students are apt to make light of plain, unideal, bustling men of that sort; but God serves Himself of all faculties. Philip brought Nathanael and the Greeks. And where a whole church is stagnating in a community, one such man will ferret out needy souls, and set activities agoing which abler men are powerless to achieve.

Then another great lesson. Christ did not despise the passive in human nature. Quiet, phlegmatic men, ill to move, with no enthusiasm, ready with mild objections against action, provokingly still and slow, when we would have them bestir themselves, have their place in the kingdom. They have great solidity of character, unshaken reverence, deep instinctive trusts. Under their fig-tree, quietly ruminating, they feel and note the touch of the divine through the whirl of the human. They cherish providences, store up coincidences. As movements do not stir them, reverses leave them in unbroken calm. Men and women confide in their unquestioning piety. Many a time men of that type have anchored an age to the unseen. The evangelicals in recent centuries were many of them men of that type, and we have known not a few in our own time. The evangelists or teachers who think that they are to drive all men along a single track and put upon them one hall-mark, simply do not understand the manysidedness of the humanity with which they deal. And not knowing men, they browbeat those whom they should encourage, and depreciate those who are nearer the kingdom than they know.

Instantly the master saw in Nathanael a type of Jewish religion, like that represented by Simeon, Anna and many in every generation of the faithful. Jesus was not afraid to praise. "Behold an Israelite indeed," marked by a spirit free from all insincerity through constant loyalty to God.

And now note another line of approach, subtler and more striking, to win one whom most leaders would have passed by as of little worth. Nathanael was self-mistrustful, the kind of man that needs to be encouraged into strength. And the master to fasten him in the mood of surrender, to lift him out of himself in a life-long devotion, throws around him a gleam of omniscience. "When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee." There are many humble hearts living aloof from the world to whom the sense of God is habitual. They build on the promises and are waiting for their fulfilment. Like others, this man had been wrought up into expectation of a coming Deliverer. And when he heard of an eye that had been on him, seeking after him, while hid from mortal vision, in a moment he felt this was the One from God seeking out His own, and he exclaimed, "Thou art the Son of God, the King of Israel." This quiet man had gone furthest of them all. The fact that Christ far off yearned to and found out his secret heart, evoked a radiant certainty. And Christ's heart, touched with a confidence and vision so utterly unrestrained, crowns him with His favour, giving a prevision of the Ascension.

What a masterly work this was. How He grasped these men, along the line of their faculties, by what was deepest in them, and turned them wholly to His influence. Even here and now His work is constructive. The Kingdom is coming and there are some of the pillars. What a work for humanity was done that night in Jerusalem, and on the journey north to Galilee, the Peter of Pentecost, the John of Gospel, Epistles and Revelation won to His side, not to speak of the other ministries which made their mark on the Kingdom of God.

IV. And now let me rapidly describe the last stage in these early movements. Without any undue exercise of fancy, can we not realise the glow which must have filled the soul of Jesus as the first faint outlines of His mission took shape before His eyes. The new wine of the Kingdom was mantling in His own veins, and therefore, with great appropriateness He prepared new joy for the marriage feast. The significant point is however, that He cannot rest. He goes down to

Capernaum, but He does not tarry. Approaching the history from our special angle, we discern what is frequently passed over. His mind is full of His mission. The passion for souls has come down upon His soul. He would be among the throngs of men, and so He takes advantage of the Passover almost immediately to return. He is roused to a strange sensitiveness and moral intensity. The central purport of His mission burns in His heart. He longs to divulge the full range of God's grace, and sweep the people into the embrace of Divine love. Jerusalem, however, is insensitive to His attractions. Souls of narrower mould, that have never been wholly fused with the fires of divine love, cannot understand how prophets of fire can search out from every crevice the moral corruption of a nation or city. So Savonarola searched out Florence. So in an earlier day Isaiah searched out Judah by the spirit of judgment and the spirit of burning. And thus the very heart of Jerusalem opened like a blossom of evil before Christ.

Surely it is worth while, trying as men may, to live ourselves into the soul of Jesus at this time. Do not deem this an exercise of vagrant imagination. It need not be—for the Master has said of the Spirit, "He shall take of mine and show it unto you." He who was within Christ sustaining every thought, nerving for every action, and so building up His human character, is with us to interpret that life. Think of that transport of holy indignation in which Christ gave Himself away, driving out the cattle, overthrowing the tables of the money changers—aflame with wrath yet yielded up only to zeal for the Glory of God. We get exceedingly near to our Lord through that self-discovery. "I, only I, am left," said Elijah, "and they seek my life to take it away." It is the grief of every prophet soul, but none ever felt it as Christ. To see religion so dead that men could chaffer and higgle and cheat on the altar steps, seemed to Him the apotheosis of wrong, and all the prudences and even minor legalities are whelmed in the floodtides of holy anger.

But even more striking is, what we would call in a man, the sorrow of disillusion. He sees the shapely corridors, and as He steps forth, the dream of beauty which Herod's temple was universally reputed to be. But for Him it has no loveliness. Only the dead carcase of religion is there. A man here would have turned bitter, and if he were coarse he would have grown satirical. But the spectacle of evil only touched in Him the love that longed to deliver. In a flash there came the thought "after all that is only the shadow of the true." And in the great love of the Eternal Father that is only opening the way for the founding of the true temple of redeemed man.

Let the dead past bury its dead. The new day was dawning in which through His own death humanity would be united to God. "Destroy this temple and in three days I will raise it up" (John ii. 19).

The work to which you are called is no professional service. Your very soul must be one with the will of God, so one that even your passions are mastered and under the control of that loyalty. The sorrow of defeat must be your sorrow, as if your own salvation were bound up in the issue; even as Moses cried, "and if not blot me out of Thy book which Thou hast written" (Exod. xxxii. 32).

Under the spell of such emotions He went forward to this first Jerusalem ministry. It was a profound disappointment. The very attachments to His cause discovered the non-receptivity of the people for the spiritual. Yet His spirit rose in fuller manifestation to meet every opportunity. To Nicodemus He discovered the profoundest truths of the Kingdom—winning only a secret disciple. There is no open door for Him in Jerusalem. The campaign, entered on in such fulness of aroused emotion, ended in failure. He went out to John, but even the short interval discovered a widening gulf between the Baptist and Himself. John was perfectly conscious of this, expressing it in the words, "He must increase but I must decrease" (John iii. 30). And so, as the Master left Jerusalem, He bids farewell to John. He must follow His larger light whithersoever it leads. He has more to give to men than His fore-runner—the very least in the Kingdom of heaven being greater than he (Mat. xi. 11). And so by what the world would call the force of circumstances, what was really the ordering of God's providence, He is led back to a provincial sphere among the hills of Galilee and by the shores of the lake.

While in many things so transcending mere human vision and capacity, how closely does the ministry of Christ lie to the course of common experience. How completely Christ lived within human conditions, aiming, resolving, helped or opposed by circumstance, responding to outward influences on every key of feeling from sorrow to indignation, changing His plans to face unexpected issues. Yet amid all He remained constant in surrender, and amid seeming defeats He kept winning incidental victories and making further advances. Never fear the clouds of seeming failure. Often the seeds of the greatest victories are watered by them. Even going back, He won the Samaritan woman, and gathered many beside into the fold.

In next lecture we shall see the meaning of all this preparation in the ministry that opened among the Galilean Hills.

THE DISTINCTIVE METHOD OF JESUS

III

THE DISTINCTIVE METHOD OF JESUS

AND now we come into the peculiar sphere of Christ's earthly ministry as addressed to the men of His own time. We desire to learn the ground which Christ occupied, the methods which He pursued. There are reaches in His thought into which we do not travel. We have to do with His human life, and with His preaching and teaching in relation to those whom He addressed. What were the lines of that immediate activity? That they should be original in the highest degree is to be expected. That they should discover a wonderful insight into human need and the springs of human aspiration and endeavour—after what we have seen is beyond doubt. And that we should attain a juster and profounder view of our peculiar responsibilities, in following Him afar off as ministers of salvation, is confidently to be hoped.

So far as visible results went Jesus Himself was not conspicuously successful as an evangelist. His immediate task in the brief period of His public ministry, the plane on which it moved, the ends at which it aimed, and the results achieved, are so overshadowed by the events which crowned His career and the subsequent enormous development of His church and Kingdom, that if not overlooked they are apt to be treated cursorily and as of secondary interest. In Christ's whole method of laying Himself out to deal with men, there is nevertheless matter of vast importance for the conduct of an evangelical ministry.

This study moreover is of peculiar value at this present time. We find the Great Teacher in an unspiritual age, when men were either sunk in materialism or given up to form, bearing in upon and appealing to the human soul, moving on one plane, but proving men from many points of view, to arouse and draw them on to the vision and reception of the grace and mercy of God. Because of the reactionary forces of evil this is a work always needing to be done. But in the present age, when throughout Europe and to a calamitous extent in our own land, vast masses have been withdrawn from all interest in the spiritual, to live content on the flat secular level, this discipline is absolutely indispensable. As the Pauline ministry of grace created the reformation, Christ in his method of approach may take captive the modern world.

But let us turn to the actual situation at the point where we broke off in last lecture. His effort to establish His ministry in the capital had not succeeded. He renewed intercourse with John only to find already a difference of scope in their consentaneous testimonies. Then broke the first note of hostility from the Pharisees. As Dr Plummer remarks,[1] "Much as they disliked and feared the revolutionary influence of John they feared that of Jesus still more." And to crown all, like a clap of thunder came the beheading of John in Machaerus.

The prevailing insensibility, the shallowness and unreality of those who had been attracted to His ministry, the hostile intent of the Pharisees, the cruelty of Herod all combined to thrust Him back into the obscurity of Galilee. He was not to teach Israel from the standpoint of Jerusalem. Not His even, to thrill the land like John from his nearer seclusion. As numerous teachers, however, in all ages, who have humbled their souls in unmurmuring submission to accept the will of God, have found, so He who in meekness was one of them, while Lord and Saviour of them all, learned the great lesson, that in utter absence of all favouring circumstances, yea in defiance of insuperable forces ranged against Him, the work of God must go on.

As fate shut Him into obscurity, heaven opened.

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[1] "International Commentary on Luke," p. 115. (T. & T. Clark.)

"He returned in the power of the Spirit to Galilee" (Luke iv. 14). Even amid the tentative efforts resulting in seeming failure, He had enjoyed remarkable proofs of the power of God. The free devotion of those five men, and still further, the conviction and conversion of the Samaritan woman, by which she was roused from utter degradation to be a brave and successful witness, not to speak of the immediate response of her fellow townsmen, would rejoice His heart. God was moving on a plane of His own by powers in Himself, quite apart from and above the forces of the world. Accident then was no accident, apparent hindrance was no hindrance. All that has transpired was in the counsel of God best for the fulfilment of His great design. The great words recorded in Matt. xi. 25, whether spoken at this time or later, record the vision and joy of His Spirit in this hour. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes." "I thank thee," perhaps no words in the Gospels have awakened greater wonder not to say stifled incredulity. But they are not the excess of an overstrained loyalty. In a man we would call them the ascent into a clearer vision of the characteristic quality of his mission. Providential circumstances are leading the Son of God more articulately to express to Himself the unique plane and characteristic of His earthly ministry. While He was in touch with all that went before, while His mission was identical in aim with the ministry of John, being a gospel of the Kingdom, yet was it to be on a level all its own. While other teachers were forerunners, schoolmasters, Christ, as a Son over His own house, was to bring His children into the liberty and fellowship of His Kingdom.

Perhaps the most characteristic attribute of genius is this, that the writer brings a new quality into literature, and speaks to men on a new platform, within a world newly conceived, yet embodying the richest fruitage of his age. No one had ever looked on nature in the exact light of Wordsworth, nor indulged in similar veins of reflection. His poems kindled a new sensibility in the human mind, and gave to cultivated thought a new bent of fancy and quiet meditation.

> "The harvest of a quiet eye
> That broods and sleeps on its own heart."

That is a pale human analogy of the higher fact on which I am now insisting. The powers of Jesus were not those of genius however great. True, the sensibilities and intellectual sweep of genius were in His human soul, but these were whelmed and lost to view not only in His sainthood, but in that consciousness of sonship so characteristically human, as occupied with an earthly life and death, but into which there flowed a vision of God, a consecrated purpose, and a width of intellectual or rather spiritual horizon which remove Him from the measures of the merely human, and suggest irresistibly, all dogma apart, the indwelling Divine.

But by how much Jesus stands above the level of mere genius does this quality of genius stand out in Him. He has sounded the full meaning of that phrase Kingdom of God. As vegetable life stands above the realm of the inorganic, and animal life above vegetable, and mind above both, and over all these the realm of moral personality—so in turn these were to find their goal in the Kingdom of God, which from above should unite the created to the uncreated, man to God. Look at the Johannine sequence in chap. i.: "The Word was in the beginning with God" (v. 2). "All things were made by Him" (v. 3). "In Him was life and the life was the light of men" (v. 4). "And the Word was made flesh" (v. 14). He was the way, the truth, the life by which the last, the crowning junction was to be made. Now, just because He was to occupy this special sphere laying hold of the spiritual appetencies, the sense of spiritual need in man, it was a distinct advantage to deal with simple natures in whom the lower gifts were less developed. Even inventors and discoverers feel that their strongest opponents are often the men who have amassed knowledge up to the limits from which they would advance. The Pharisees would bring in their traditions, the Sadducees their sceptical doubts. The plain people were more simply conscious of their needs and therefore lay more open to the divine. "I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, *because* Thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent and hast revealed them unto babes."

The passage from which we purpose deducing in detail the distinctive method of Jesus, is the narrative of His inaugural discourse in Nazareth, by which He opened His public Galilean ministry. He has come back home to promulgate His programme. How Luke alone should have preserved an account of this incident is to us a mystery. There are two passages in Matt. xiii. 53-58, and Mark vi. 1-6, which it is possible may refer to the same incident, but if so they leave entirely out the characteristic features of Luke's narrative. Most likely these belong to other and more ordinary occasions, while it has been reserved to Luke to give us this graphic delineation in the life of Christ.

At such a moment one pauses with reverence to take in the scene. How many places there are, mostly solitary and apart, sacred because of descents of God on select spirits of the race? The desert thorn where broke on Moses the I am, the plain outside Damascus where Paul saw a light above that of the sun, the fig-tree in Milan beneath which the will of Augustine was bowed, Erfurt and Wittenberg, twin centres of a mighty regeneration. But none come so near to us as this of Nazareth within her guardian hills. Where as a boy He had worshipped, in the very place in which the purpose of God had unrolled before Him, and He had wakened to discern His own place in the eternal counsel, Jesus stood forth now to unfold His clearly-conceived, definitely accepted mission—what has proved to be the central mission of time, which was to link mankind to God.

Let us leave the mere setting, however, and enter into the inwardness of Christ's thought. He found fit vehicle for the deepest thoughts of that hour in a word of ancient prophecy (Is. lxi. 1-2). The starting-point of the full vision of God is to be found in the clearer apprehension of a past vision. Mayhap long before, in that very sanctuary, ere the yoke of ministry had come, Jesus had leaped to a foresight of what His ministry would be, as the Rabbi read this passage in ordinary course. At least, however, there is a lesson for us in this fact. For the common, indeed the universal custom to preach from a text, there is far more justification than we sometimes think. In human speculation we move away from the past to the future. In the vision of God we grow up from the all-sustaining root of His declared will, to more articulate developments of that will; in other words, to a larger self-consciousness of what that will implied. There is an historical element in Holy Scripture—a gradual unfolding within advancing human conditions of spiritual truth; but within this outer sheath there is the essential unity of an eternal counsel, in the hand of One who sees the end from the beginning.

Turning to the words as they lie in Isaiah, we shall not conduct an inquiry into what they meant, within the limited vision of the prophet, and what new articulateness they had won from the progression of religious thought through the ages. What breathes a bloom and glory into these words, and raises them to a transcendent importance which their author never conceived, lies in the fact that Christ claimed them for Himself, said plainly it is in Me these words are fulfilled. The greatness of the passage is seen first, in the beginning of its accomplishment through Christ.

To receive Christ's thought about Himself in relation to His whole mission—surely that is something to wait for with empty and purged spirits, to take as given with the simplicity of submissive wills, and handle with care to introduce no bias of our own. I notice first, then, something absolutely new. He speaks from within the unclouded circle of the divine fellowship. He comes forth with a commission from God. Here is no prophet like Isaiah crying before the divine glory, "Woe is me for I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips," and then when purged and strengthened, made bold to offer himself, "Here am I, send me" (Is. vi. 5, 8). True, there is no formal assertion of divinity, but there is an unquailing consciousness of unhindered surrender to the divine Spirit, and of His whole being chiming and in accord with the holy Spirit possessing Him. And as thus one with God in the full consciousness of His life, He comes forth from God with a commission to carry good tidings from the divine Being.

The supernatural character of His mission, the transcendental basis of that message, struck the open minds of that old world, immersed in the natural, with irrepressible wonder. And as unbelief, and in its measure criticism, are driving us back within the limits of the natural, they are creating a situation of mist and uncertainty and gloom, from which men will advance again to accept Christ on the footing of His own revelation, —one with God, commissioned from God, with a direct communication from the Divine of good tidings to men,—something from first to last out of the plane of the natural, the very crown of God's manifestation.

Now if that be so, and there can be no dubiety that that is what Christ says, then Christianity has a place in history and in the life of each man; and the Christian ministry has a centrality to human need, and a supremacy among human concerns, which multitudes of Christian men totally fail to realise. Christianity is not one among the religions of the world, if the crown of them all. They are aspirations toward God: this is a revelation from God. We rejoice in every gleam of light which they contain, in every aspiration towards a loftier than material good, and bold feeling after a divine fulfilment. But in Christ and His revelation, God hath spoken, and we have found the verity of salvation and eternal life in Him. In other words, what Christ said at Nazareth has been verified in the experience of millions through nineteen centuries.

Having thus from Christ's own words developed the solitary platform on which He stood in approaching men, let us now consider His programme, or rather the distinctive method He adopted in approaching men and attracting them to Himself. One can discern that His thoughts are moving on lines similar to those expressed in the new covenant of grace taught by Ezekiel (xxxvi. 25-27). There, the sprinkling, the new heart, the right spirit were all to be of grace. So here He comes forth full of the Spirit, anointed for service, to transact with those who are poor, broken, captive, helpless. All the resources are in or with Him, His message is from above. He must find them where they are, awaken the first stirring of hope, interpret them to themselves, enable them to realise their misery, their poverty, their captivity, their blindness, their bruises, and rouse them to receive what He came to bring, as glad tidings, release, sight, liberty from the galling chain. When one sinks into the meaning of His figures, one sees how entirely the whole work was to be of Him, the awaking, the consciousness of need, the felt sense of misery, the impulse to escape from misery, the sight of the gospel as God's way of escape, so that they might take the decisive step of faith into liberty.

The wonderful thing about this passage—what comes first and remains last, is Christ's exalted consciousness of an endowment of the Spirit, so plenary, and an anointing and dedication so divine, for what seems to men so lowly a task. He saw, when as yet no man understood, the divineness of the work of winning broken lives back to God and liberty—more even than is spoken of here, for the objective act of atonement must also come in. That, however, lay in the future. What impresses us here as of momentous importance for us who are following Him in ministry to men, is the consciousness of Christ, that only in the power of the Spirit could He lay bare men to themselves, read out every secret of their hearts, raise them to look at the facts of their case and so draw them to God. Further, in that answering of the hearts of men to Himself, by this arresting power of the Spirit, there was God's express and original witness to the fact that Christ carried a commission from Him, that a divine day of opportunity had dawned. What was the meaning of this searching light and power if not as witness to these facts. Thus did Christ lean on the Holy Spirit authenticating His mission. From such a plane did He essay to go forth to men. In such an all-embracing compassion of succour did He stoop to them. To such a deliverance in fellowship with God would He raise them. Countless words confirm this as the central all-embracing aim of His ministry. When John sent to ask, "Art Thou He that should come"—almost as if He were recalling this scene and the programme which He had enunciated at this place, Jesus spoke of this work of interpreting and meeting human need, in phrases similar to those in this passage. And then as if vindicating the essentials of His mission and message before those who might not be able to enter into its significance, Jesus utters an almost minatory sentence, "and blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Me."

We have reached a fundamental point in this course and in our view of the missionary methods of Jesus. "As my Father hath sent Me, even so send I you" (John xx. 21). On this platform does He approach men. On this platform must we approach them if we would be His true followers and finish His work. The Spirit of Truth who continually proceedeth from the Father bears witness of Christ in His servants, and out of the fulness of that illumination the servants bear witness (John xv. 26). "He shall glorify Me, for He shall receive of Mine and shall shew it unto you" (John xvi. 14). Believing, then, that our ministry in its main lines follows that of the Master, being a service to which we are called and commissioned by God, and for which we are empowered by the gift of the Spirit, the end being the communication of the divine message of love and grace to a lost world, let us marshal under separate heads its distinctive features.

1. The Gospel ministry moves on a peculiar plane of its own, being a proclamation to man of the revealed will of God.

2. As when Christ said, "this day is this Scripture fulfilled in your ears," it is still proclaimed by men who themselves stand rooted in their own age, and have grown up within human conditions. They are necessarily involved in the thoughts and aims of their own generations, and

so in the very conception as in the presentation of their message, they adjust it to the needs of their own time. And so what comes from beyond time, the unchanging counsel of God becomes suited as a special and characteristic message for each age.

3. To receive and convey this revealed will of God, the preacher requires himself to be in realised union with God, to live under the power of the Spirit, and in especial to be in the hand of the Spirit, to be taught, upheld, and led in all public service.

4. Along with this endowment and inherent in it, is the alienable consciousness that he has been called of God, and so may count on help in this work.

5. The subject matter of his preaching is the Gospel or good news of God communicated by Jesus Christ, which have been proved in experience to be the message of God to his own soul, and which are not merely his individual findings, but those also of the living Church in whose communion he stands, and of all Christians and Churches back to the fountain of revelation.

6. As the Gospel has become the living possession of his soul and the spring of a transformed life, through the witness and action of the Holy Spirit, his testimony to others appeals directly and immediately to the spiritual appetencies that

are in every man. In paving the way for reaching to man's soul he may and will employ fact, analogy, history, argument, but he addresses that whole region of man that fronts God, and so he leans upon the Holy Spirit in forming every thought and uttering every word.

7. Since men are only conscious of the void in their natures by being made conscious of their divorce from God for Whom they were made, it lies with the preacher to put himself in their place, interpret them to themselves, discovering to them their need, creating the desire to have it satisfied, and then showing them the full present satisfaction in Christ. This can only be done, however, by the Holy Spirit irradiating the preacher's own life, and giving him a resistless power of entering into the secrets of other lives, so that they are laid bare before God, and God in impressive reality is brought near to them.

8. Even when thus illumined and empowered, the preacher cannot of himself achieve the supreme result of bringing men to God. These creative results are always kept in God's own hand. The servant must commit himself in every utterance as a vessel prepared for God to use. Every new creation is an act of God's power through a consecrated will, God immediately meeting men through the creative act of His Spirit, an element of Divine sovereignty going to every such product.

9. The preacher, then, is in the hand of God, to carry out the sovereign will of God as He may momentarily lead. His call is his warrant to speak in the name of the Lord, and the felt witness of the Holy Spirit, making living the testimony of Christ to his own and other hearts, his authority.

10. For him all men stand in one rank as made by God, yet without God and needing Him as the one good. Yet while making no difference, since all are afflicted with a common need, the preacher knows that God is working His own purpose through him which the event only will declare. Even the reception and rejection of the message are in the hand of God. As Jesus says elsewhere, "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me."

Such is the ministry of the soul-winner, surely the most august on this earth. Into such alliance with Himself and His Spirit does God call us. The forces of the Eternal must make their home in us, that they may work to results of conviction and renewal, transcending all simply natural experience. And yet more, these spiritual powers must be in the hand of God, keys on which He may play as it sovereignly pleases Him. When a Paul is brought out of blindness and bondage to liberty at the word of an Ananias, we feel that a mighty unseen power must have intervened. But although the effects are not so striking in the eyes of the world, the same outflashing of divine power is unmistakable whenever a soul turns to God. And if we would be followers of Christ and renew the experiences of apostolic and revival days, we must regard ourselves as heralds or messengers of Christ, and seek to be in His hand for just such wonders of His power through our own ministry.

Preaching, indeed, has in many cases fallen to a much lower level, from which, whatever else may be accomplished, the great work of God cannot be done. Stopping short of the momentous fact that in the Gospel we have a positive communication from the heart of God to men, much preaching moves on terrene levels and in the power of a mere natural persuasiveness from beginning to end. Often it is no more than a professional statement of the Church's position, an apologetic for the faith on grounds of reason, a reduction of positive doctrine to broad human ethical principles immediately perceptible by the natural man, a purely prophetic exposition of individual and social duty, or of Christ as the ideal man—enunciating a new law of public and private conduct. In a word, the preaching goes more to spiritual self-culture, the perfecting of a present human ideal, than to the communication of a Divine message having in it the promise and potency of eternal life, and a heavenly kingdom proclaimed on the authority and with the power of God.

And thus, so far as this may be the case, there are certain very conspicuous lacks, which if they are not met may issue in a great catastrophe. The Churches can only live and grow through the sustained respect and reverence of peoples blessed by their influence, and recognising in them channels of divine grace and power. There are, indeed, certain considerations which for a time may obscure to partial eyes the action of that law. The benefits associated with religious services and institutions are of such a kind—meeting man in the deeps of his being, forming pure and beautiful characters, setting in motion philanthropic movements, creating wide horizons of thought and generating noble impulses—that they continue to inspire a hereditary respect, after power has disappeared from the Church's testimony and true aggressive activity has ceased. But that can only be for a time. The hungers and miseries of men are inextinguishable; and if the multitude waken up to realise that the Church has no authentic message from God to their souls, no manifest proof that God is working by her to the renewal and sanctification of men, they will utterly disregard or in bitter mockery turn again and rend her.

Those who are in course of preparation for the ministry are facing a momentous crisis in the history of the Kingdom of God. Indeed, beneath that, lies the rooted conviction in every reflecting mind that enormous changes are impending in the kingdom of man. The nations are leaving the stereotyped and bounded relations of recent centuries, and are floating out into combinations and eventualities which no man can foresee. And all this imposes a burden of care upon every teacher aspiring to help his fellow-man, of a very solemn description. To catch up with present fashions is to tie our careers not merely to a fleeting cloud, but to an explosive bomb. Many movements of high repute will be shattered. Elements which we are told to-day must vanish will abide, and vaunted ideal schemes which we are told are to take their place will dissipate and disappear. Where to cast our grappling irons so as to get a grip of the central trend, and move on with it to victory, is not easy to discern.

As one sees multitudes of eager minds setting their house in order to meet the strain of the coming times—going back over the past to restate on natural lines the Christian faith—there is a word of Christ which, like a ruffling breeze, breaks athwart these clashing speculations of man. "Can ye not discern the signs of the times?" The past is past. It has gone from us. We can only discern it in parts and at angles, through the researches of individual men. Christianity lives for us in its achievements up to and in the present hour. In the new birth of millions, in the rejuvenation of the ancient world, in higher ideals of personal purity and public virtue, in a diffusive charity and an expansive sense of brotherhood, in the passion for liberty, enlightenment, right and spiritual redemption, knowing no limit short of the habitable globe, she has thus far given sample and proof of the wholly unequalled powers at work within her. And when Christianity has gone thus far on lines peculiarly her own, and, in the century just past, has revealed a new power of adaptation to nations and empires hitherto lying outside the sphere of her influence, surely the reasonable assumption is that for those who hold the faith, and follow Christ, and prove His power, there are more wonderful victories in store.

The fact of Christendom is a fact as much as any other, must be studied from within, in full light of all its characteristic features. What the faith was which actually founded and instrumentally sustained this regenerative force in the world, is also an ascertained fact. What is to be attained by going back to the times of Christ, and with the help of theories of natural evolution trying to put a construction on Christ's teaching and aims, which were not the view of those who immediately absorbed Christ's influence and laid the foundation of His Kingdom? Whom has this method of demonstration been proposed to help? Christianity has stood from the beginning on supernatural foundations. It approaches all men with a challenge to faith in a divine communication. It declares that without an inner renewal of the soul by divine power, men can neither see nor enter into the Kingdom of God (John iii.). It will not receive those who are willing to accept it as a natural development. To experience the spiritual fruits of redemption, we must come on to Christ's own ground. And when we find that the actual outcome of this re-statement is to represent the unique and characteristic facts of the Gospels as no facts, neither the virgin birth nor the bodily resurrection, neither the miracles nor this inner consciousness of absolute oneness with God; and still further that the entire narrative is overloaded with imaginative additions of legend and dogma, the facile growth of apostolic credulity— what are we to say? Writers of this school are not attempting to account for a thing which we never saw, but for a reality which we have proved, a revelation which has transfigured our souls, a fellowship with God into which we have entered, and more, a power whose public effects on the life of mankind are matters of patent fact to this day. And the Christian consciousness rejects the whole explanation as beneath the meaning and import of the work which Christ has done and is doing among men.

If many preachers, instead of weaving theories that have presuppositions of their own as their sole justification, would listen to the voice of Christ, "Can ye not discern the signs of the times?" they would be rudely awakened. The Christian documents as they conceive of them would never have originated the apostolic Church; nor, left to themselves, could they with all their apparatus of critical illumination perpetuate the Christian Church of this latest age for twenty years. The supernatural truths which they so ruthlessly eliminate, form the adamant foundations of the Faith. The world is witness to what the halting beliefs of a scarcely veiled rationalism are working in our time. The grand indictment against the Church is the evaporation of spiritual concern, the descent of the great mass of the people to secular levels and a contented living within secular horizons. One can discern this pervading society in every direction. Pleasure, and the pursuit and enjoyment of material good, absorb attention and interest, almost to the exclusion of every other thought. Look at the literature which the multitude read—not an ideal element, or aught beyond the excitements and diversions of the selfish life. Nothing is sacred in institution, or holy in character, to their restless and insatiate egoism. They can appreciate association for social or trade ends, in the absence of other deities they magnify the State, and to escape local industrial jealousies would nationalise more and more the chief industries. But Sunday is becoming a day for their pleasure: they gather by thousands around bands, where their fathers would have stood spell-bound under the preaching of the Word. The spiritual—not merely as the conscious fellowship with God—but as the bare consciousness of a God to be obeyed and loved—and eternity as the sphere of their higher existence, have lapsed from their conscious life. Religion as the private opinion of those who want it may be tolerated, but with no recognised claim on others, or title to speak with any supernatural authority.

That condition of things must go on to worse if it be not arrested, and that soon. As yet there are hereditary reverences, lingering in those who are frankly living for the present. Inherited standards of judgment, from robuster Christian times, sway lives that are out of keeping with them, living on a lower plane. But there are evidences not a few, that as the claim of Christ is ignored, the ethics of Christ will disappear. It was His gospel, the enunciation of the divine Kingdom, the birth of men into life eternal, the joy of communion with God—in short, it was a life above the world which established an ethics above the world. And when He is rejected and ceases to be powerfully preached in that supreme relation, His ethics become depraved to the ethics of the market-place, stoic self-sufficiency or epicurean ease.

To accentuate the divorce of modern man from God, we have instead of the Scripture doctrine of creation, the theory of a struggle for existence and a survival of the fittest. Now, do not suppose that I fail to appreciate the value of evolution as a method, or its harmonies with the spiritual view. What has commended this theory to the multitude, however, has been the supposed elimination of a directing mind, the apparent justification for the belief that this was a huge gamble of a universe, where out of an undirected strife certain things came uppermost. For right and love has been substituted force; for the brotherhood of man, a bastard imperialism; for missionary enthusiasm, an exploitation of the black races on behalf of the commercial supremacy of the white; for healthful rivalry, the crushing power of all-controlling combines. Interests—like the huge drink traffic—thriving on human degradation, lift up their heads in proud security. Gambling has spread its network of demoralisation over all the land, and even leading journals can speak of legislation against betting, as an organised hypocrisy. Sport has become a supreme national interest, and men can go on acclaiming their favourite team, when the dead and the dying are being extracted from collapsing jerry-built stands on the playing-field.

Account must be taken likewise of the profoundly materialist foundation of modern socialism among the masses not only of Britain but of Europe. As Leroy Beaulieu says, "The State remains the sole God of the modern world." Marx—the Bacon of Socialism—rests his doctrine not on justice, not on a sentimental love of man which he never mentions without immeasurable scorn, but on the blind growth of productive forces which must in the end swallow up the capitalist. Social democracy in Germany "denies wholly and unreservedly any spiritual purpose in the universe." "Arsene Dumont anticipates the day when the hypothesis of God shall be expelled from human brains." "The great European narcotic of Christianity with its ideals of sympathy and brotherly love has been keeping the natural superior—the strong out of his own." "A new table, O my brethren, I put over you. Become hard. For we are emancipated. The world belongs to us, we are the strongest. And if men do not give us these things, we take them."

Benjamin Kidd, in his "Principles of Western Civilisation," declares that those utterances which I have quoted from him, even the last extreme saying by Nietzsche, proceed from the materialistic interpretation of history, and express without varnish or apology the true issue of present theory. If these statements do not suffice I might add much more to show that emasculated religions are of no use in the struggle immediately before us. The one standpoint for this age is Christ's standpoint, the one gospel His gospel, the one power the power of the divine Spirit. The unredeemed evil in human nature laughs to scorn human idealisms. The one thing which will suffice is that men be saved from themselves by being brought to God, through Christ and by the ministry of the Spirit. Only preachers who are actually in the hand of God, and filled with His power, and carrying a divine testimony of pardon and redemption verified in their own experience, have a message worth speaking about to this age. There must be the answer by fire, the appeal to and manifestation of Divine renewing might. The whole world-view of men must be changed—as God only can change it—by bringing out their dependence, their guilt, their oblivion of the highest meaning of life, in opposition to this egoism. Philosophy will not do that; a wider and saner view of life will not of itself shame men from their selfish materialism. For this is a spirit of rebellion far more than a theory—the unsubdued hostility of man to God. "This kind goeth not out but by prayer and fasting." The only countervailing force in all the world is the Spirit of God, in a Church wholly yielded to Him—"convincing of sin and of righteousness and of judgment."

THE MAGNETISM OF CHRIST

HOW HE DREW MEN TO HIMSELF

IV

THE MAGNETISM OF CHRIST

HOW HE DREW MEN TO HIMSELF

We have now seen the distinctive standpoint of Jesus. He speaks from within the circle of fellowship with God, to that in man which hungers for God. His plans, His point of view, His objective, are all unique. And it is ours in the liberty of the Spirit to occupy the same plane and address the human spirit on the same level. The nearer we keep to this ground, the larger our participation in the triumph of the Son of God. The more we decline to mediate and lower levels, the further we descend in our influence upon individual souls and the social life of man.

This is a truth which is but very feebly realised in our time. The opposite conception has taken a powerful hold of very many, viz.:—that the spiritual cannot stand alone, cannot make headway by its own characteristic light and influences, much less is able to overpower all opposing forces, by resistless appeal to the whole nature of man.

In former generations men laboured at an elaborate apologetic by which they hoped to make spiritual truth acceptable and authoritative to reason, not knowing that the spiritual as such carried its own immediate sunlike evidence, and commanded an assent, which reason could not create, and which rose from regions of moral and spiritual intuition, when deep called to deep in immediate response.

To-day in another form we have the same mistrust of the spiritual. Multitudes follow the Christian faith in so far as it is supported by man's ethical experience. For them we have in Christ the supreme expression of the ethical ideal, and everything beyond is naught. But an ethical ideal can only survive as enshrined in a spiritual person, who must in the whole circuit of His personality be of concern for us. Merely to take certain principles of right, revealed in Him, and follow them because they seem to suit our nature is to take advantage of an ethical ideal for our own selfish ends, not to bow to it. And so Christ moves on to bring us into the fellowship of God, and to discover His own holy will to us as the guide of our entire being. He would have our whole life regulated from a divine centre in the unseen, and would have all its activities lie within the horizons of a divine purpose and thought. And we do not follow Him until we come unreservedly out to His standpoint, accept

His testimony regarding the unseen, and live with God in Him.

And so far from being impracticable, this standpoint of Jesus is the only one from which we can reach human nature as a whole. While to the natural man the spiritual seems to lie outside of human interest, as a matter of fact it focuses upon itself all the chief natural interests of universal man. Every other standpoint is one-sided. The frankly selfish goes a long way in this fallen world, but in the long-run rouses against it all the nobler instincts of humanity, and is surely defeated at last. Every ethical standpoint has run into a narrow particularism at some point, and has provoked antagonism because of its one-sided interpretation of right and good; some being ascetical in their cast, some merely prudential, some artistic or æsthetic. And so it is that every human teacher has only a limited following, and inevitably provokes antagonisms which shut him into his own set.

Because Christ stands on the spiritual, and speaks to man as spiritual, He alone can appeal to men of every description of gifts and disposition; and, disregarding all barriers of thought and race, address with equal force and directness every son of man in the whole world. There is just one attitude in which all are equal and one, our relation as creatures to the Creator. From this standpoint we discern the true meaning of each function, and its ministry to all the others. In realising this master end each secures the maximum of satisfaction. There is no side of man that is not involved in the appeal of Christ. There is no kind of good which is not included. That God has discovered Himself to the creatures whom He has made, and is drawing near so to possess them with Himself that they shall realise their ideal—that immediately and profoundly appeals to every son of man. If we would win the world for Christ, then we must come frankly on to the line of the spiritual, and deal with men in Christ's own power and from Christ's ground.

This leads us to one further preliminary point. In another respect the method of Jesus differs from that of all other teachers. The latter move from without, inwards. He moves from within, outwards. They try to establish some common understanding with those whom they would attract—inform the mind, persuade the judgment, move the feelings and so gain the assent of the will. Jesus does not reason; He shines. He throws a light around another life, the immediate effluence of His own spirit, and that life stands interpreted to itself in this spiritual illumination. He aims first to win the man, and through the response of the human spirit to His own, to bring men into the divine fellowship, and then from that standpoint of the divine fellowship lead the soul out into the knowledge of all things, seen from the divine standpoint and in the divine light. All philosophy bears witness to the unsolved and insoluble mysteries attaching to our theories of knowing and being. Jesus does not in this dispensation scatter all mystery, but He lays the foundation for an ultimate perfect solution by turning the question upside down. Being comes before knowing. First let us become one with God, and one day the veil shall be taken away. We shall know as we are known; being like Him, we shall see Him as He is.

All this brings us to the standpoint of Jesus in dealing with men, and the principle of His search. He accepted no creed as conclusive, no policy as final in regard to their possessors being in the Kingdom. He did not accept the common standards of goodness as decisive in regard to this higher fact. He went seeking for men in whom there was an openness to the divine. Wherever they might be He claimed them as His own. He came forth to seek in men the dormant sense of God. He made nothing of men's findings—did not so much as go aside to look at them. The precious thing in man was the unstifled sense of want, the consciousness of the unattained, the quenchless thirst for something which all created existence cannot give—aspiration, however mistaken—in conscious aim, yet which at bottom was aspiration for God.

The value of this point of view for getting into contact with the religious needs of men cannot be exaggerated. Religion is not a moral police or a spiritual school of character to fit men for the tasks and exigencies of the present, but something beyond all that, in a fellowship for eternity of the soul with God. Even from the ethical point of view, any products of character and conduct which are short of that, are not decisive for the person as a whole. Just as a man may be a good soldier, an expert business man, marked by a high sense of business honour, and yet a moral failure in higher regards, so consistently with conformity to terrene standards, a man's deeper nature may be closed against God. And in that case his very morality is inadequate as resting on provisional and secondary foundations, and more, vitiated, and rendered nugatory, by the basal wrong of denying his sovereign obligation to God.

If we would bring man face to face with God and establish the divine Kingdom—though religion be the fountain of the deepest and truest morality—we must depart from all search into moral attainments, or classification into moral standards, and search for those who, whatever their position, have some lingering hunger for the unattained. We must speak to the thirst, the felt want, the unquenched aspirations, which show that amid all failure and defeat, the man is aiming at higher things. Every atom and fragment of good in the world will relate themselves to the new and master motives to obedience, when once the man is brought into fellowship with God. But Christ's task and ours is to create and maintain that fellowship, to bring in by the blessing of God a new central life which shall antiquate, not only evil but the poor and relative measures of good, and founding the whole life on God, shall make all things new.

And that this whole subject may live before us in biblical proportions and fulness, I shall bring the views of Paul into comparison and contrast with those of Christ. We have here, I believe, both comparison and contrast—fundamental unity in consistency with minor diversity, and for our practical and immediate end, the latter of equal importance with the former. Both Jesus and Paul declare that there is a direct and immediate witness of God in every man. "That which may be known of God is manifest in them—for God hath shewed it unto them" (Rom. i. 19). I can remember no saying of Christ's which, with equal directness and fulness, enunciates the same truth. He came immediately to children of the Kingdom. But many things conspire to show that in His view the inner witness was not confined to them. Many were to come from the east and west and north and south and sit down with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob in the places of rejected Israel. By the magnetism of His cross He would draw all men unto Him.

While there was thus such an openness of the soul to God, bearing witness to the fact that God had made men for Himself, yet Christ, as decidedly as Paul, points out man's alienation and rebellion. It would be an interesting study to discover from incidental hints and bring together, all the lights in which Jesus reveals fallen man's relation to God. Take these as an instalment. Like a lost sheep man has voluntarily wandered from God (Luke xv. 1, 8, 11). He has sunk so completely out of the God sphere that he is lost to the idea of his own being, the divine image having become incrusted and buried. And this has resulted from an act of self-will by which man with all his filial appetencies has taken his life out of the hand of Him who was not only his creator, but was going on to discover Himself as Father. Nor could he establish himself in this external relation—he was perishing, and under the blight of death—he could not even see wherein true life, the goal of the human soul, consisted; or even if he saw, he could not enter in. The Son of man must give His life for the sheep. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the Kingdom of God" (John iii. 3). There is nothing in Paul more absolute than this.

But here ensues a marked diversity of method between Jesus and Paul. There is no discrepancy of doctrine. There is no real difference at bottom, in their judgment of man. Paul had his task, essential, of primary value, but limited to the specific point at which he aimed. In one sense the Master gave him the superior place. Paul's Epistles come into the very core of every redeemed experience, and so in the evolution of Christian doctrine they are of essential importance. They are a science of life, the biology of the new nature. They reduce to rational and connected expression what, taught of the Spirit, Paul found within the redeemed soul. The relation of Paul to Christ is the relation of science to nature. The former may be more exact, but in the synthesis of the latter there is a liberty, a manifoldness, a contact with concrete fact and with the infinite variety of human nature and actual human conditions, not only of immense value but necessary to the full sum of divine revelation.

Dealing with the immediate point how a man may be just with God, Paul emphasises the truth of the wrath of God against sin, man's utter incapacity to satisfy the law, his need of a salvation, founded on grace and proceeding from the begining by divine power. It is the purest mercy to withdraw men from all creature striving, to lean on the righteousness of God in Christ. And whenever men are really brought face to face with God and His salvation, there is no other message whether from Christ or Paul. But while that is truth it is not the whole truth, and there are times when it is of the utmost importance to dwell on the other side. There are multitudes in whom the sense of sin is so dormant, whose consciousness of relation to God is so vague and intermittent, who live so entirely within the circle of personal ambitions and desires, that they need to be dealt with on grounds closer to their actual feelings and experiences if they are to be moved at all. In Paul's teaching, there are many implicates of thought which the unstirred man does not understand. Paul's conclusions are the end of a long process in history, and they are often the result of a long process in the individual man. Multitudes who have been brought up in living Christian atmospheres, have been so nurtured in spiritual conceptions, that when the Spirit of God moves on them, they enter at once into this teaching. But on the other hand there are vast numbers living under the sky of naturalism, convinced of the ethical and other truths which may be learned there, to whom this teaching, because of the missing links, seems like exaggeration and a denial of verities which appear to them incontestable.

Accordingly, if in our evangel we simply repeat the formula of Paul, irrespective of the attitude or the difficulties of our hearers, we shall draw those who are prepared and repel others. True, in our evangelical teaching we must always come before we are done to the full doctrine of sin and grace which belongs to Christ as much as to Paul. But Jesus brings in a number of other truths perfectly consistent with that conclusion, yea, heightening its meaning and intensifying its application. Jesus is establishing no system. He is living as the Son of the Father, doing the will of the Father before and in relation to men. He meets men in the changeful moods of each passing hour, and to each one, under the feeling of the moment, He discovers the love and holiness of God. The intercourse is as objective and free as that of men with each other, in the market place or the home. He does not dogmatise, or get them into the groove of His thought, before He leads them out to blessing. Rather He comes down to where they stand, adjusts Himself to their dim and wandering thoughts, and out of the coil of their confusion, interpreting them to themselves, lifts them up to God. Here we have no doctrine nor stereotyped formula, but God through His own Son in the living play of personality, meeting and drawing, engaging and responding to every variable mood of the human heart.

Yet, as in the play of the fountain, the droop of the lily on its stalk, the eye music of a bird's flight as well as in the procession of day and night, and the yearly circuit of the planets, you have expressions of the great central law of gravitation; so all the free loving interchanges of thought are living embodiments of spiritual fact and law. While to Christ as to Paul man is utterly estranged from God, not able of himself to see the Kingdom of God, incapable of coming save through the grace of Christ, and except the Father draw him, yet the life thus characterised on its highest side is not to be regarded as a blank negation, a uniform dead weight of resistance to all that is good and true. Theologians, looking merely at one side of Bible teaching and working with one set of conceptions, have sometimes gone so far towards that error in their representations, as to be in hostility to the actual facts of history, and so cause a revolt of the general conscience.

With infinite subtlety, Jesus presents man in his estrangement from God, really and fully as any writer of Scripture, and yet He has wonderful liberty in dealing with man on every side of his nature—the highest as well as the lowest. He sees the neutralising, perverting element of evil in the whole vast contexture of circumstance.

Yet, though man be by nature in a condition of impotence and blindness, his nature was so made to centre in right, that there cannot but be "fallings from him, blank misgivings of a creature moving about in worlds not realised." The will of sin is there, but there is one hedging him in. Conscience speaks. The consequences of evil carry their silent message. Then the moral unit of society is the family with its powerful instinctive impulses. "Ye being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children" (Mat. vii. 11). And as society rises out of the family, civic and public virtues are evolved. Even the publicans love those who love them. Round about men too are the healing and stimulating ordinances of nature stirring instinctive gratitude and admiration. God makes the sun to rise on the evil and the good. Thus is the common grace of God round all men, stopping for multitudes the fouler approaches to evil, diverting the thoughts of men to outward and necessary things, preoccupying them with labours, instinctive affections, motives for generous and unselfish acts, provoking and challenging intellectual activity by the signs of order and law, by the ever-growing power of turning natural properties and substances to ends of human use. And with all this healthful activity, recognition of relative obligations increases. Christ's anger with the scribes and lawyers because of their prostitution of natural rights, binding heavy burdens on men, shows that in His view, with all their religious pretention, they were sinning against the virtues and sincerities of common human life. His parable of the unjust steward too, reveals how He took account of prudence, wisdom in the conduct of affairs, aptitude for reaching foreseen ends, won even in courses which from the moral point of view were not creditable. "The lord commended the unjust steward because he had done wisely." And having respect to all the developed social activities of men in their manifold relations, He says, "The children of this world are wiser in their generation than the children of light" (Luke xvi. 8, 9).

The broadening light of human wisdom too had not been without its influence on the very build of man. And in especial, divine teaching coming to Israel from generation to generation had widened the horizons and trained the sensibilities of those who were still but "the lost sheep of the House of Israel." Jesus said to the lawyer about an ethical point, "Thou hast rightly judged" (Luke vii. 43). In many He recognised an enlarged moral discernment which would but deepen condemnation. Further, in His mode of appeal, He counted on a responsiveness to spiritual truth, from those who had been educated by the discipline of Israel past its more primitive stages. When the scribe said that to love God and his neighbour is more than all burnt-offerings and sacrifices, Jesus did not treat this as no knowledge, still less as moral affectation. He who had so often to charge His countrymen with hypocrisies, frankly recognised in this the moral findings of a sincere soul and said, "Thou art not far from the Kingdom of God" (Mark xii. 34). Yea, more, He saw in natural men disciplined in wisdom, qualities of ingenuousness and moral enthusiasm which in themselves were beautiful. Looking on the young ruler He loved him.

Just because even in their fall, mankind was so great, revealed with all their sin so unquenchable a thirst for the right and good, and such relative worth from the practice of what virtues they knew, did Jesus long to draw them into the liberty of sons of God. He put Himself in their place. In the illumination of the Holy Ghost He searched into the condition of each one, bringing every faculty into the light of the moral ideal as seen in Himself, and then leading the man self-interpreted into the gracious saving presence of God. His own perfection woke the latent, imperfect, thwarted, spiritual consciousness in man. And then from out the centre of His fellowship with the Father, Jesus drew by His personal magnetism, revealed in words or works of power, all open souls into the heavenly presence. He was not concerned to cast them down, argumentatively to expose their corruption, their nothingness and impotence. He touched them in all the appetencies of their souls where they lay openest to the divine, and then so shone in, that when they were thrilling with whatever sense of God they had ever known, they yet saw their immeasurable distance not only from the perfection but from the solid foundations of good, and cried from the depths of their revealed selves, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!" (Luke v. 8).

I cannot hope to have at all adequately stated this particular aspect of the distinctive method of Jesus, but I have felt it to be imperative to present it even so imperfectly. Because it throws a light on a work in which, if we would bring Christ and His Gospel to this generation, we must seek earnestly to engage. While there are still multitudes so nurtured in Christian conceptions that we may bring them at once to Paul's doctrine of sin and grace, in our day a vast proportion of modern men and women have so withdrawn within secular horizons and are living for ends so confined to the present scene, whether material or intellectual or moral, that they need to have the true meaning and proportions of their natures interpreted to them, that they need to be drawn by the aspirations and unanswered enigmas of their being, back within the horizon of God. That is our calling, and it is the most exalted calling in the world. It can only be done by those who are wholly for God, who live for Him as other men live for gold or position or fame or knowledge. And even in the case of such, success can only be secured by the illumination and anointing of the Holy Ghost, freshly received in our endeavour to grapple with each successive soul.

Nor is it enough, if that were possible, simply to copy Jesus in His actual methods. His objective was the actual men with whom He had to deal, within the coil of their thoughts and under the actual pressure of need which they experienced. Scotchmen and Englishmen in this twentieth century are not circumstanced or affected as Jews in the first. They have their own difficulties, approach questions from their own standpoints, and have their own governing conceptions. The work of interpretation has to be done over again, within the horizons of the present, and dealing with facts as we find them. We must approach them in the spirit of Him "who took their infirmities and bare their sicknesses" (Mat. viii. 17). So far as men can do, we must give our lives for the sheep, putting ourselves in their place, thinking for them, giving ourselves to them. And not only must we live in the power of the Spirit so as personally to be at His disposal, but we must count upon His pentecostal fulness given to build up the Kingdom of God.

Professionalism, exaggerating the worth of official place and authority, sooner or later divests our ministry of its true inherent power. Sacerdotalism, claiming for priests the place of mediators, carrying down to men in the closed channel of their orders heavenly grace, inevitably outrages the religious sense by its utter foreignness to the message and spirit of Christ. But if we approve ourselves servants of the One Mediator, in the hand of God, to carry out the purposes of grace, by calling men to the obedience of faith, they will yield a deference and concede to us an authority, compared with which mere professional status is a shadow. The world is sick of shadows of the true, but when men are found witnessing in utter self-abnegation, and clothed with the visible witness of Him who answers by fire, then in a measure such as history has never recorded shall humanity respond to the Gospel call.

And now, let me close this lecture by giving a series of actual examples as to the way in which Christ dealt with men. Amid all diversities caused by race, training, and circumstances, there are great abiding experiences and attitudes of the human soul common to men of every age. I see in the Beatitudes (Mat. v. 3-11) a series of deep-sea soundings by which Christ sought to plumb the depths of human hearts. To the giddy multitudes of Jerusalem He could not trust Himself. The minds of the Pharisees were sealed by their own formulas, steeled against all persuasion by their self-sufficiency. He came out among those less hide-bound, and those exposed to the hardness and frequent vicissitudes of human experience. Seeing the vast multitudes, stirred with a sense of want but ignorant of satisfaction, He gathered them around Him, the disciples being in the inner circle. They were all in the category of learners, some having gone so far as to confess Him, others only questioning and learning.

When men are brought under the power of spiritual realities, there is wisdom in special gatherings for men and for women, for inquirers and for converts, for young and for old. But when we are arousing men to the sense and reality of spiritual things, the wise course is to take all who are willing to be taught together. What is spoken to the most advanced, is sometimes the very thing which affects the beginner, while in the effort to stoop to infantile perceptions, we take captive those of mature experience. The human personality is far subtler than any one of us can find out. A man of between sixty and seventy once came to me utterly broken down under conviction of sin. While he kept opening the plagues of his heart, my mind went searching back into the sermon to discover the shaft which probably pierced him. To my wonder and almost chagrin—such proud creatures we are—I found that what the Son of God by the Holy Ghost was pleased to use was a little story—almost too familiar for pulpit use—which I had told the children. Remember one man is a microcosm. God hath set eternity in his heart. Living in time he has hold of two eternities. He cannot explain himself by anything that he sees. Many a time he yields to a simple expression of experience what he withholds from discussion and argument. And he who is taught of God can so throw the line that each finds his own attachment.

I once rode past the Horns of Hattin where these words most probably were spoken. I seemed to see the multitudes—the flotsam and jetsam of the whole region gathered round the inner circle of the disciples, and that round the Lord. His first words spoken to the disciples went out with added emphasis to the last man on the outmost circle of the throng. Behold Him sending down the plummet into that throng. Might I put into a sentence or two the purport of these golden words? The great thing in this life is not having but wanting, turning from all earthly havings to thirst for the unattained. Life's possibilities lie infinitely beyond life's realizations. Having is a limited thing, which, in possessing, we transcend; a deep pervasive sense of lack touches the infinite; every true thirst of the being resolving itself into a thirst for God.

If we could bring a message like that level to every one in an audience, should we lack auditors? But let us take the particular beatitudes. For what a number in every generation the first comes. "Blessed are the poor in Spirit for theirs is the Kingdom of God." In a sense it is an introduction to all which follow. We all start life with the buoyancy and confidence of youth, but the vast majority get worsted at some point. We have to acknowledge disillusion and defeat, the successful of us no less than the glaring failures. Everything depends on how we take our rebuffs. Many close their eyes to facts, and blaming circumstances, become intoxicated with a whimpering egoism. But to every soul loyal to fact, the shattering of idols, the falling of the night of adversity lays bare the deeper needs of the man. And here comes his trial, will he confess his folly? In conscious poverty of soul is he now willing to learn? That man is blessed—no matter what his present miseries. Not one of all the legions of those who rest in what they have, is for a moment to be compared to him. He is near to see that the true powers of the universe are for him. All essential good is open to him, even to the kingdom of heaven. Christ stakes His reputation for veracity on that fact, He challenges his hearer's faith. You may state all that as a formal doctrine, and it will fall on preoccupied minds and listless ears. Bring it level as a fact to actual pressing conditions, and men will forget everything to realise the boon.

But there are those to whom life is one long regret. "Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted." Not only are they humbled by adverse circumstances, they are convinced that their chance has gone for ever. By their own folly they have closed the door upon themselves. Never can they retrieve the past. They have made their bed and they must lie on it. They have sown to the flesh, and of the flesh must reap corruption. What comfort could you give such a man? He may not be thinking at all of what you call his soul. He may simply be weeping over buried hopes, a frustrated career, ruined manhood. He may be in a very wilderness as regards all the higher aspects of life. The plunging sword of his anguish may be the very fact that he has staked everything on the present, and it is lost. And the hoped blessings may be lost for ever.

Christ does not go outside the man to preach or inculcate. He preaches to the man from the deeps of himself. Do you know that you are a blessed man—more blessed than in your most prosperous days? Suppose you had got all at which you aimed, you would have been a prosperous worldling shut into your sufficient self. You would not then mourn. No! you would have been far below that level. That mourning of yours has educative elements of priceless value. You are waking up to see that these things never could have satisfied. If those higher feelings had not been present, after the first sharp pangs you would have set your teeth, and bowed to fate. The man made for God, created to find a perfect satisfaction, is crying in you. Your despair is the obverse of an incorruptible hope. Do you know you are more blessed in having that, than in all the possessions of the world? You are on the way to victory. The voices of fashion and the world's wisdom, and of the tempter have died in you. You are listening to the incorruptible, God-made yearnings of the human heart. Think you that He who made you so, cannot satisfy the desires He has made? You have erred by pitching your desires too low, far too low. Pitch them higher. Rise to the full heights of aspiration. Trust in Me. You shall be comforted.

We are on somewhat changed ground in the next beatitude, "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth." Even in the outfield of worldliness and paganism, the great bulk of men have been law-abiding, prosperous citizens, who continue the despair of the church, because they have so much reason to be content with things as they are. Life, however, has been testing even them. The whole aim of providence is to sift out from those who rest in the material, all who have an opening, not to say a hunger, for higher things. We are not fit to deal with men unless we discern this providential law of God. The people who will not come into mission halls, who do not fit in readily to ecclesiastical machinery, strong-minded working men, the active and prosperous business and professional classes, thoughtful, self-reliant brain workers; they all are being tested in the school of life. And while many cling to their blatant sufficiency, some are recognising the over-soul—the great Will that orders all. They are becoming meek, humble themselves to watch His footsteps. They have risen above the insane dream that the world is their oyster to open and eat. They want to follow, to submit themselves to laws, to read the thoughts which God has written in His universe. In a word they make an opening for the wisdom that is in the world to come in, inform and work through them.

That may not have gone far as we judge—not even to the recognition of a personal God, much less to prayer. But even so far as he has gone, that man is on a higher plane than all the self-seekers of the world, and he is on the road to more. There will come into his lowly receptive spirit, the light which guides to victory in every realm of knowledge and practical endeavour. He has only to follow on into higher regions of God's unveiling to get the true inheritance in God which will make all lower inheritances really blessed. "Blessed are the meek for they shall inherit the earth."

And now, having unfolded the general method and spirit of these beatitudes, let us group, in vivid relation to each other, those that remain. Because man, fallen though he be, has been made for God, every deep thirst of his being is at bottom if he only knew it, a thirst for God. And so there rise up in human souls far off from certitude and peace, thirsts for some form of good, gleaming out upon them from the highest that they see among men. In some there is a stirring of a sense of right, and they hunger and thirst after its fulfilment. In some the sense of benevolence diffused through the world creates an impulse of mercifulness, while others amid the very mire of time are struck by the beauty of pure aspiration and holy character. That is life's true good in their view.

Out among men, far as yet from full reconciliation with God, such emotions are working, such lines of character are forming. There is nothing in this to be called attainment but only aspiration and search, and because of profound inconsistencies they might never come to ripening, (we believe never would) if left to themselves. But yet they are real as far as they go. And unless you can with the Master get to their side and move on from their standpoint you will never lead them on to the full fellowship of God.

Notice Jesus says Blessed! ay, by how much they have been feeling toward the truth they are blessed. They have left the earth-bound herds behind, they are at last seeking for the path toward eternal good. They may have far to go and much yet to learn. But such thirsts as these are prophecies of satisfaction. The man who longs for right in a world of wrong, shall yet, following Christ, rise into perfect righteousness in Him. He who touched by the Divine benevolence shows mercy, when the fountains of the great deep break up under a sense of sin, shall find mercy. And the secret longing after purity shall be rewarded with the vision of God.

We might follow this line of treatment right out to the close of this great passage, but for the practical end we have in view these brief sketches may suffice. Is there a lock or ward of the human soul which Christ cannot fit into and move with resistless power? May we learn of Him, in this large sympathetic and discerning way to enter into the minds and hearts of men, that we may win them for God.

THE LINES OF HIS AGGRESSIVE ACTIVITY

V

THE LINES OF HIS AGGRESSIVE ACTIVITY

We pause in the regular development of our theme, to note one very pervasive characteristic of the ministry of Christ. It is the province of this lectureship to deal mainly with the evangelistic aspect of the ministry,—or otherwise to prepare for that aggressive activity which is specially directed to the undecided within and surrounding the church, in the various communities in which ministers may be placed. On the one side, they have to maintain and carry on the organized life and work of their church. On the other hand, they and their congregations subsist to fulfil the Saviour's command—"preach the Gospel to every creature" (Mark xvi. 15), "beginning at Jerusalem" (Luke xxiv. 47). What relation are these two aspects of their work to have one to the other?

This question is of distinct importance at the present juncture, because we are passing from one era in the practical work of the church to another. As regards aggressive work, we have for nearly a century been living in a Judges' period, in which after seasons of lull and reaction, God has raised up notable personalities—laymen, many of them—and others, ministers, wholly given up to this form of activity. Such names as these rise at once to the memory—Professor Finney, Rev. William Burns, Brownlow North, Reginald Radcliffe, William Booth, and D. L. Moody. These men and a host besides hardly less worth naming, by independent missions, mostly associated with the Churches, have widely extended the Kingdom of God, have set in motion manifold Christian activities, and by their influence on and through the Churches have accomplished more than by their immediate efforts.

Nothing can be more indisputable however, than that this direct ministry of evangelism is the chief Christian responsibility of the organized church itself. Paul was no unattached evangelist, but one of the Divinely appointed founders of the Church, yet he said "Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, though God did beseech you by us we pray in Christ's stead be ye reconciled unto God" (2 Cor. v. 20). Christ connects the Pentecostal Baptism with the ceaseless centrifugal witness of the church, from Jerusalem out to the ends of the earth. When a Church turns back upon herself becoming her own care, that Church begins to die. Not all the talent, learning and organization in the world can keep any Church alive and victorious over her foes; but only the fulness of the Spirit, acting out through consecrated wills in a ministry of conversion, and thus reacting on the edification of the Church's own life. When virtue goes out of us, when because of the felt power of God in and with us, we speak with authority and not as the scribes, horizons of spiritual possibility open up, which throw us in upon God in an agony of need and expectation, and create an impression of the supremacy of the spiritual which pervades the great mass of the people.

Unless a Church consciously and with her whole heart is seeking these ends, she is undeniably guilty of sin. She is not living for the purposes for which Christ founded the Church—the glory of the Father, the triumph of His Kingdom, the victory of the Spirit, and so there is a proportionate withdrawal of Father, Son and Spirit from her operations. Babylon was the rod of God's anger against unfaithful Judah. And what we call the hostile forces of to-day, are not merely natural tendencies, but God's chastening rod, humbling us before an exulting materialism.

How then in consistency with our positions as ministers of the Church, charged with the task of feeding the flock of God, and maintaining her organized life, can we throw ourselves into this aggressive labour making the Church more than she has ever been, a true propaganda. These two aims are not antagonistic. The pastor's jealousy of the evangelist, the evangelist's far too frequent disparagement of the pastor, have no justification in fact. The true and full function of the Church in this modern world shall not be seen, till from end to end these two are working in closest association and full mutual appreciation. Let us show how Christ touched in His ministry both sides of our peculiar responsibility, keeping in close contact with the living Church of His day, yet striking out on new and original lines of aggressive activity.

1. Though Christ occupied a wholly unique position, having come to antiquate the past by founding the Kingdom of heaven, yet in a hundred ways He emphasized His vital and essential contact with the past. He stood in a great historical development of Divine purpose. His work was the fulfilment of all that went before. He never forgot too, what we so often forget, that there is a glorious objectivity as well as a piercing subjectivity in His religion. He deals with man in his inner life as no other one does. Yet He so roots him in God as to lead him out into an objective brotherhood, destined to be influential upon the world's life, and pervasively present in human society. We must emphasize the outwardness of the religious fellowship as well as the inwardness

of the spiritual life. Jesus then saw in Israel a provisional and temporary effort to set up in one nation, a Kingdom of God, based upon a real if symbolical relation to and fellowship with Himself. God was in that old history and in every step He was pointing to the end. Abraham saw His day. In Moses and all the prophets He found things concerning Himself. The temple was His Father's house. He associated the Last Supper with the Passover feast. And when the Old Testament feast of Pentecost was fully come, He sent the baptism of the Holy Ghost which created the Christian Church.

He honoured the temple services by his attendance. He frequented the synagogues. He sent the healed leper to show himself unto the priest. He paid the temple shekel. He betrayed His unspeakable reverence for the house of God by driving the buyer and seller out in a very tempest of holy rage. With all His reasons for moral indignation at the insincerity and heartless deceit of the leading representatives of religion, and at their base hostility to Him, He led no crusade against the established religion nor even suggested separation. He met His death coming up to the great feast. He rode publicly into Jerusalem as their King at last come to Zion, in the feast of Passover and begun fellowship with God.

Now all this is of value for us. We cannot without loss retire into our individual selves, and disregard the struggles and deflections of the past, the accumulated results of Christ's presence in and with His people, stored up in the life and thought of the Church. Christianity is not a mere opinion, but a revelation of ultimate fact, which comes into very positive and transfiguring relations with all types of human life, and expresses itself in innumerable activities and institutions. Mingling with all the interests and aspirations of the peoples whom it possesses, Christianity takes special embodiments in types of doctrine, organization, poetry, art, literature. Churches arise expressing in their manifold organisations different sides of the one universal truth. Specific directions are given to social and individual life. Ideals blossom in great variety within consecrated lives, which become the models and inspirations of generations. Light is invisible, until striking an atmosphere and being reflected from a thousand coigns of vantage, it reveals something of its glorious possibilities in illuminating a splendid landscape, where towns and hamlets lie bowered in trees, and the encompassing hills are mirrored in fiord or lake.

Nor is it otherwise in the Kingdom of God. Christianity stands forth in real objective fact, and in the characteristic quality of its influence, in the society which it has called into being, and in the sum of its influences on the race. The representation is indeed, as yet, very imperfect. With all the answering aspects which shine from every quarter of the Christian world, blending their contrasted lights into one whole, there is given but a very feeble and distorted and even in parts a false view of the Christian ideal. Indeed, Christ, living in His Church by the Spirit, ceaselessly makes these defects, errors, and scandals to appear. And so almost without intermission, impatient souls are found trying some short cut to the ideal, by leaving the Church, breaking with the continuity of history and starting a new system from the ground of their redeemed experience and in the light of the Spirit. If they are wise, however, they soon come to discern that Christ is in His Church, despite all her defects; that in her continuous testimony and world-wide influence they have evidences of the reality of the spiritual which they cannot discard; that in her creeds they have developed into indefeasible completeness of expression the great principles of their belief; that in her saints they have types of spiritual greatness, and in her literature ripe expression of her spiritual experience simply priceless for the education of the religious life. Yea, they see that they themselves have taken on the mould and impress of the system and Church under which they have grown up, that they themselves are only single pulses in a vast sum of sanctified energies, and that they can get most and do most by fitting in to the whole system of forces, receiving the impulse of the whole and making an individual contribution as God may enable them. The great Pentecostal baptism was to the Church, and in the Church, Christ's body, individual members are upheld by the energy of the whole for their individual parts.

We forget that the perfection of the Kingdom is a social perfection, and that individual character and even spiritual thought only reach completeness as the saints rise toward their ideal brotherhood. We must take the whole abreast, and from our Church standpoints press up along every line of our action towards the ideal, constantly eliminating imperfection, withdrawing the mass of believers from excess and defect, sharpening the sense of duty, accentuating the claim of Christ, heightening men's ideas of the possibilities of faith, and widening their views of Christian responsibilities. Yet must we discard nothing vital and true, however racy of the soil, until we find the larger good in which they merge, the wider harmonies in which we may keep their essence, and set aside only their limits and eccentricities. Churchmanship is not a thing to be tolerated as an existing fact, but to be more seriously grasped and more deeply understood, as central to the conception of the Kingdom of God, to be livingly realized as the outward and historical means by which Christ would have His Kingdom visible, pervasive, permanent, in modern life. We are under no necessity of copying the exclusiveness of the past, but we need more of that faith and attachment to the Church, as a Divine institution, which led our fathers to safeguard its liberties with their blood.

II. Thus did Christ stand in relation to the living past of the Kingdom of God. And now in coming forth from within the circle of unclouded fellowship with God, and in the power of the spirit, to proclaim His Divine message, what lines is He pleased to lay down for Himself, in pursuance of His new and original mission?

There is one great lesson written broad on the face of the Gospels which in my judgment has never been adequately apprehended nor practically realized, containing within itself Christ's own large conception of what the aggressive message and mission of the Church should be. Indeed we have but to survey the literature of the present day to discover the divergence of men's views regarding points so fundamental as the scope and end of our Lord's ministry. To some He is a social teacher, to others the exponent of an ethical ideal, and only to a section of His followers is He still the divine Son, revealer of God and founder of Redemption. Following out the thought to which we are about to give expression, we shall be able to give the synthesis of His whole activity.

Christ's line of action is but another illustration of a great law of method exemplified by Him in another connection. "Gather up the fragments which remain that nothing be lost." (John vi. 12.) Undoubtedly we have seen in Lecture III. what is central in the mission of Christ. He came from God to bring men back, by a propitiation, into the love and favour of God. And charged with this high commission, He first turned His thoughts to those who had a measure of light, through association with the old covenant. He would utilize every fragment of their past findings as a pedestal from which He would unveil the superior glory of His Gospel. In particular, He would serve Himself of the reactions into which the sons of Israel had fallen, to discover in many directions the bearings and applications of the message which He proclaimed—so that all with open eyes might behold that message as a great many-sided fact, touching human life at every point, and bearing in upon every need of man.

Now here we may note a fact which, apparently accidental, is found to have a universal significance. There were three main reactions in that day from the highest that was known of God up to the coming of Christ, a barren intellectualism, a moral self-sufficiency, a confinement within the horizon of the present. And the logic-chopping Sadducee, the proud Pharisee, the Rich Fool are universal types of religious degeneracy on the part of those who still cling to the name and form.

Christ differs from other evangelists in that He bestows so large a part of His attention on these degenerate types. By an earnest and ever renewed evangelism, He forced them in their emptiness and evil out into the light. And so His message stood forth in many aspects individualized by the antagonisms which it overcame. As against a system of arid opinion and positive rule, He unveiled a religion of love in which sinners won by the sacrifice of love, served in the liberty of love and enjoyed direct communion with God. Opposing the self-sufficient legalism of the Pharisee, He pierced it through and through with the shafts of righteous criticism, laying bare its boundedness, externality and injustice, and brought out the ethics of the Kingdom of God. And lastly, in contradiction to mere worldly religiosity, living for the present, He portrayed the living spirit of the religious life, its filial fellowship with the Father, and particularly its eternal issues.

Now, there were several effects of this course pursued by our Lord. His ministry while moving from a spiritual centre and aiming throughout at the one end of bringing men to God, took a broad range and intermeddled with all the life of

His time. He was not content simply to unfold the good news. His ministry was, from the centre of that Gospel so to unveil human life in its light, that men could not fail to discern the bearing of the whole on every duty and relationship. In Christ's view, until men realized this message spiritually, lived it ethically, and in the power of it rose above the world to take in the eternal issues of things, they had not grasped His meaning nor fully entered into life.

But it may be said that this formed no part of the conscious aim of Christ, having been forced upon Him by untoward circumstances. A careful study of the Gospel narratives, however, forbids such a conclusion. In the great discourse of the Sermon on the Mount, spoken in a Galilean seclusion, where there is manifest a conscious aim on the part of our Lord to give a sustained view of the Christian platform and ideals, He introduces as a foil to His presentation, the externality, the self-seeking, the formalism, the insincerity of the Pharisees. The contrast runs as a ground-tone through the larger part of His discourse. Then we have the parables of the good Samaritan, the Pharisee and the publican, and indeed many others. Jesus put questions to His opponents, as well as met those which were put from their side. At least a third of Matthew s Gospel is given up to the conflicts of Christ with the Jewish reactionary types, or His teaching in contrast to them. In the heart of his Gospel, John devotes more than six chapters to the controversies which were pressed by the Jews as to His divinity and messiahship. But it is unnecessary to labour this further. The way in which these Jewish parties and classes are shown up in their limitations and triviality, over against the serene and wonderful mission of Jesus, is the direct reflection of the actual effects of His ministry on every side of the life of the time. They rose up to kill Him, because they had no other resource. He had virtually silenced them and made them ashamed of themselves.

Now it is from this standpoint that we discover the true synthesis of our Saviour's mission. Those who make Jesus an ethical teacher, or the founder of the true principles of society, find elements, equally authenticated in His words, which they cannot reconcile with these leading aims. Christ came to found the Kingdom of God, to bring men into the fellowship of God, and God into the life of men. In this He was reaching out to the crown and completion of all that went before, and so His message was bound to have bearings on human life in all relations. This was a life which would go out into the unseen and therefore the eternal issues of life must be kept ever in view. No one has taught as Christ has done the eternal laws of character, the ceaseless clashing and conflict of human ideals among the millions of men under the sound of the Gospel, the inevitable discrimination into two camps, two ultimate allegiances, the sheep and the goats. That horizon of eternity envelops His whole mission and message. While, however, this eternal scope pervades all that Christ says, He is carried with all the greater illumination and force into the present ethical sphere. He portrays the principles which should animate those who are living such a life towards such an end, the relations which they should sustain, and by contrast discovers the selfishness, the insincerities, the downright dishonesties, the hideous cruelty and wrong of lives which, with whatever profession, are rooted in the pride and self-sufficiency of the natural heart. No wonder that these words have attracted the attention of all lovers of right, of all who war with human inequalities and wrong. They form, taken together, a collection of ethical precepts to which the unsophisticated mind and heart of all men say Amen. But they are not Christ's gospel, nor are they issued as an ethical creed capable of universal application to every problem of human society. They are at once less and more. In the hands of a religious teacher moving to bring men from all self-centred positions into the fellowship of God, these are illustrations of general principles, applications of moral judgments which carry us further than themselves.

And these two aspects and applications of Christ's teaching are balanced by a third more pervasive than both,—the inwardness and liberty and grace of a life at one with God, manifested freely, in childlike obedience, loving human relations, eager service, radiant simplicity, unsulliable brightness, amid trial and sacrifice. He so lived with God on the common human level as to fill the land with His charm. Destitute of every human accessory and advantage, He compelled men to feel that this was the ideal life for which they were born. So convinced were they of this being the crowning, all-embracing good, that they left all and followed Him.

Now in all this there is a wisdom to which we do well to take heed. Following these reactionary and decadent types of belief He so made the spiritual, ethical, and eternal issues of the Gospel stand out in sublime relief over against their miserable limitations, as to make His message live before the nation. How far we are from making the outstanding features of the spiritual view of existence stand out in their superior glory, above the reactions of half-belief and no belief in our time! Within the Church we preach spiritual truth in a half-esoteric way to the experience of spiritual men. In our evangelism we go largely to the slums. But the middle classes, whether externally attached to, or broken with the Church, who have fallen from the power of living religion to self-centred standpoints, intellectual, ethical, practical, the very classes Christ so dealt with, we pass by. Millions of them are outside the real active forces of the Kingdom of God. And so far as organized effort is concerned, or even solemnizing impression, we let them remain outside, while we go to men who are no more our brothers among the more facile poor, or even the heathen at the ends of the earth.

Certainly let us remember these and do more than we have ever done, but our first duty is to begin at Jerusalem. Let us so unfold the Gospel of God given through Christ for the salvation of men, that in comparison, all the reactions, intellectual, moral, and practical, in which men are today finding refuge, will stand out against the living word of Christ, as Sadduceeism, Pharisaism, and worldly Judaism generally, stand out on the sacred page. In this way we would manifest the measureless resources of the faith—its heartsease and rest for the inward being, its world view so satisfying to the intellect, its ethical standard exposing all the defective standpoints of secular good, its eternal outlook which can alone overpower sensuality and worldliness. We should fill the whole sphere of interest in Britain as our Lord did in Jewry, compelling every current of thought to take up some attitude to the supreme message of Jesus.

Instead of which, to-day, this very Gospel is being looked upon as a dead machine, something lying outside present human concern and the currents of the world's life,—if it be not illusion, a mere waking dream. Thousands are going for heartsease to Christian Science, are resting on the mere evolution of things without searching into their cause, are putting utilitarianism for the will of God, and earth for heaven.

And from this ensues a further consequence. Because the message of Jesus was brought so powerfully home to the actual life of the time, and stood out in such magnificent contrast to the arid intellectualism, and stern lifeless legalism and worldly formalism of the day, it was by that very circumstance commended to the masses. Jesus had no difficulty with the multitude, except in restraining their unbridled enthusiasm. He had their ear, they flocked to Him from every quarter. Doubtless the wonder and the blessing of His miracles had much to do with this result. But more powerful than this was the charm of His words. Never man spake like this man. He taught them as one having authority, "and all bare Him witness and wondered at the gracious words which proceeded out of His mouth." (Luke

iv. 22.) The poor and struggling, whatever their lives may be, are, in sympathy and aspiration, idealists. They rise in response to lofty conceptions of human duty and large views of human brotherhood.

And we should have no difficulty with the masses. Christ would win them by His servants as He won them in Himself, if we lived the Gospel we preached, if we unflinchingly applied this truth of God's grace and the life in Him, to every side of human nature with something of Christ's insight and power. As there were reactions in His day, contradicting the spirit and aim of His Gospel, which Jesus took pains to track down and expose, so that the bearing of His teaching might stand out in more definite significance, so are there reactions in our day, associated with a profession of religion, which unfairly represent or even contradict essential principles of the gospel of Jesus Christ. Must we not then without seeking to be judges or dividers in such matters, or presuming to dictate regarding rival social schemes, with all courage press the ethical conclusions from the gospel of Christ, and counsel men to live and act in accordance with the mind of their Lord? To stop short of this is to countenance the idea that there may be two laws of life, one for the market and one for the Church, while there can only be one. What the believer is in the closet that he must be among the throngs of men. And the Church without flinching, in the power of the Holy Spirit, must enunciate the practical ideal so far as to give inspiration for a life according to the mind of the Lord.

And so this aggressive and conquering evangelism, continuing from generation to generation, never given up, ceaselessly being adapted to the immediate needs of men, is at once the Church's supreme effort to realise the Master's purpose of a world-wide kingdom, and the means by which in her continuous life she widens in scope, heightens in spirit and aim, and broadens toward the perfect brotherhood of the redeemed. A thousand opposing influences, bred of the unredeemed selfishness of men, tend to arrest it Again and again the Church has, and for long eras, been diverted from her true end with disastrous results in division and decay. If we would bring the centuries of reaction and stagnation to a close, and in this day of world-wide opportunities occupy in Christ's name, we must, under a wholly new sense of its importance and within the wide horizons marked out by Him, proclaim the message of God to the limits of the habitable world.

How we are to follow Christ along these lines of His activity it would be difficult to show. We have no ready-made answer. Enough to realise the ideal. These were the lines along which

Christ went. It will be the business of our lives in prayer and soul-wrestling to follow Him. Allow me, however, to give examples from Christ's own ministry of the manner in which He performed that task.

The first reaction from living contact with the spiritual was in Christ's day, as in every generation, a barren intellectualism. The experiences of their fathers have become concepts or dogmas, and in unspiritual mood men develop them out in logical order and defend them with logical weapons. Of course, rational men must hold, as thought in their minds, what they have proved in life. We are simply referring to those who have let go the spiritual, if they ever knew it, keeping only the shell of dogma or principle or standpoint.

As in our own day so in that time, there were vast multitudes for whom religion meant just those specific opinions and attitudes, Sadducees who in their coarse rationalism could frame grim jokes about the woman and her seven husbands to puzzle believers in an after-life, Scribes and others who were learned in the ritual of ceremonial requirement and could fasten on the least deviation from the duties incumbent on a Jew. The difficulty with such persons in that day, as in our own, is to lift them out of their externalisms and carry them back to the ground of religious reality in immediate contact with God, and the aroused sense of moral and religious obligation.

The Gospels bear witness to Christ's marvellous power in bringing men to that spiritual platform, set up in His discourse at Nazareth. He goes completely behind and away from the whole world of their religious conceptions. When they urge their objections about the Sabbath and such like, He bandies no arguments, but in a word of inspiration goes up to the living principle of divine revelation, which lies at the root of all positive requirement, "I will have mercy and not sacrifice." (Matt. ix. 13, xii. 7.) They were pushing irrationally, and out of season, the external requirements, because they had lost sight of the very principle of religion, and were building up a system of self-righteousness. When the Samaritan woman in self-defence started a sectarian discussion as to whether Gerizim or Jerusalem were the proper place of worship, our Lord rose to the spiritual standpoint and discovered for all time the essential meaning and requirements of worship. "God is a Spirit: and they that worship Him, must worship in Spirit and truth." (John iv. 24.)

But the passage which furnishes the best sustained view of the contrast between Pharisaic religion and Christ's doctrine of the free fellowship of love with the Father, is in the middle section of the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. vi.). What pictures have we here of two spiritual levels which told their tale in a moment! How repulsive the ostentatious bargaining, posturing, hypocritical artifices of Pharisaism; how serenely pure and beautiful the filial life, lived in the eye of the Father, finding joy and motive and rest in Him, learning love from His love, giving in self-oblivion of any sacrifice, from love of the Divine goodness, and winning through sheer spontaneity of love the visible crown of the Divine favour. What a gulf too, separated the parade of religiosity and fasting from the filial joy which sought the Father's presence in secret for His own sole sake, and while radiant before the world, bore inly a yoke of sacrifice which only His eye beheld. If we could make the spiritual life so bloom before men, we should win from all wanderings of error, hungry and disconsolate souls. We must make the spiritual content of our message, the beautiful resources of the life to which it introduces, live—so live in men's view by preached word, literature, song, life, till men see in our Gospel the one perfect spiritual ideal of the race.

Turn now to the second great reaction of the human spirit repeated from age to age—a self-centred morality, the attempt to put all the ethical results of religion to the credit of human nature. Human nature is always ready to settle down on the amount of ethical good which it has attained. In our day, among all civilised peoples, the sense of ethical attainment and sufficiency, like a great party wall, shuts out millions from that sense of humbling and defect which predisposes men to seek salvation.

Christ's exposure of the inadequacy of this boast on the part of the Jewish leaders, is among the most profound and searching things in the Gospels. Take the best of them and their goodness at the best, it stopped far short of God—the one true goal and ethical end of man. In no case could their righteousness enable them to enter the kingdom of heaven. At bottom it was self-sufficiency, and egoism is the contrary of faith. The publican went down to his home, justified, but the Pharisee, sufficient to himself, was shut into the prison of his own pride. His boast of meeting every requirement of God discovered his alienation from God.

But a further element of dishonour to God was added by the fact that they based their claim to a verdict of righteousness from God, upon a small externalism, in oblivion of the weightier matters of the law. But worse than that, even to their own utterly vitiated standard of right they were untrue. No great teacher whom I know dwells so constantly on hypocrisy—conscious deceit and untruth even to their own ideals. They sought the reputation rather than the reality of sanctity. They were capable of using religious quibbles to evade plain natural duties, in a spirit of profound insincerity. They bound jots and tittles of a burdensome law on the people, but made the largest exceptions for themselves, even in gravest matters of absolute obligation. And so when a loftier spiritual right and the sovereign claim of God came to them in the person of Christ, they revealed their disloyalty to conscience, by resisting that highest right for their interests' sake, even going so far as to quench the Witness for the right. They were searched to the depths by the light and fire of God. They were compelled to see themselves as they were. And refusing to recognise these realities, clinging to the superficialities of their position as the truth of their case—saying they had no sin—their sin was bound on them for ever.

And so have we to come into the midst of our generation and show the defects and corruptions of all life not rooted in God. Christ was loyal to every gleam of aspiration He found in any man, but He was inexorable as to individual and general facts. He brought out everything in relation to the one true light. And in the priestly spirit of Jesus Christ, dowered in our weakness with the power of His holy Spirit, we must not only draw near to God, but interpret God in His holiness to men. We must seek to discover not merely as a doctrine but as living incontestable reality the gulf that stands between men and God, despite all their moral refinements and lofty standards of worldly action. Granted that in many things the men of this generation are superior to those who went before, still the pride of their own merits, their unrestrained egoism, have set up new and broader barriers than ever. They are shut in from God by the self-sufficiency penetrating their moral endeavours. Instead of godliness there is a fearful impatience of God, a desire to eliminate Him from the modern life of man, a self-sufficiency, far broader and deeper than the pharisaic. Pride in the resources of civilisation, in our power of discovery and invention, in our mastery of the forces of nature for common human ends, have created a self-centredness not so repulsive in our view as that of Christ's enemies, but infinitely more intense in its extrusion and ignoring and positive disregard of God. Contrasts are sharpening, for we are two thousand years nearer the final severance of good and evil.

What fools we are in our general attitude of mind to this generation. How we ought to throw ourselves on God for power to convince the world of sin in the Christian view, of righteousness in the Christian ideal, of a judgment, where everything will be found to hang on, and be determined by, our master-relation to God. And we must not hold back from exposing the inequalities and wrongs of current social ideals. We must humble believers to recognise the hideous failures, religious, moral, social, of the present. This is not our rest nor humanity's goal. Not only did Jesus deal with the religious insincerities of the great, but with the social outcomes of their supremacy, the lawyers binding heavy burdens, devouring widows' houses, pervading social life with manifold deceits, displaying heartless indifference to misery, making clean the outside of the cup and platter, while within they were full of extortion and excess.

In all this, however, we must keep the distinctively Christian ground. It is so easy to take up with merely human schemes of reform, to fall to their level, and merely labour for their immediate and terrene ends. And in this way we contradict the universal scope of our message, by identifying ourselves with particular classes and schools. This were a profound misfortune. For men are only too eager to rule themselves out of our influence, if they can establish just objections to our theories. We must never forget that our end is to bring all men to receive God's grace: and we expose wrong and seek to sharpen the moral sensibilities of men, to draw them on to desire full harmony with right, by submission to the loving claim of God. In all this we must have supreme loyalty to Christ, and seek the guidance of the Holy Spirit that we may divide rightly between our immediate and our ultimate aims.

As to the third great reaction, turning from the eternal issues of living religion to rest in the present, it is not necessary at length to show how Christ discovers and exposes this. We have dwelt on the eternal horizon of His message, His frequent reference to the issues of the final judgment. The parable of the rich man and Lazarus was a bomb-shell, bursting in the heart of the worldly religious circles of that time. And even more powerfully, the parable of the rich fool discovers the rootlessness, the isolation, the centring in his own petty cares and ambitions of the man, who in God has not laid hold of the eternal and spiritual. In this mysterious universe his life is within himself. He is met in the story by an embarrassment of plenty. And this godlessness of the man comes out in two directions. He thinks but of storing his wealth. He owns no directing mind but luxuriates in his own cleverness. And more, oblivious of every higher need, he rejoices in having built up a secure happiness in which he may think only of his own pleasure. And yet, not only is the whole based on the sand of uncertainty. He has left the main factor out, something which does not belong to the world of things nor can be satisfied by things—his soul. That belongs to another world, has other needs, must face other responsibilities. And in the sudden call of God that unprovided-for emergency arises, his soul is required of him, and while he goes empty-handed to his account, like a castle of cards, his assurances of good fall to the ground. For all the world's applause, and the semblance of victory, he is the fool of the universe.

THE MINISTRIES NORMAL AND EXCEPTIONAL BY WHICH HE WOULD ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK

VI

THE MINISTRIES NORMAL AND EXCEPTIONAL BY WHICH HE WOULD ACCOMPLISH HIS WORK

In last lecture I pointed out, in relation to the continuity of the Church's life, the ceaseless effort which she must put forth to come into contact with each new time, and the consequent expansion and enrichment of her activities in every age. Because of this double aim then, the ministry or service by which it is carried through must be marked by certain features as adjusted to these related ends.

Here we touch the confines of perennial controversy, not, however, to be drawn into the vortex of elaborate discussion, but in passing forward to our more practical aim. My design is, from the teaching of Christ, to realize (*A*), the important place and distinct function of an ordained ministry in carrying forward the Kingdom of God, and (*B*), the room for exceptional ministries from time to time.

(*A*) That it was Christ's intention from the beginning to carry forward His Kingdom by a solemnly called and duly trained ministry is beyond all dispute. His choice and training of the Twelve are decisive on this point. And answering to this element in His ministry is their appointment to service. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts i. 8). The Kingdom was to continue through a human ministry from age to age. It would take on the type and form given to it by their activities and results. "I have appointed you to bring forth fruit and that *your* fruit should remain" (John xv. 16)—not only the divine substance, but the human mould. They were to go and make disciples of all nations—each generation entering into the vision of God through the teaching of these contemporaries, yet each brought into direct contact with the divine facts for themselves—baptized into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost; and all of them coming continuously to the standard of the divine Word, teaching them "to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you" (Matt. xxviii. 19).

And alongside of this teaching the continued presence of the Risen Christ with His Church is taught with equal emphasis, "Lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world" (Matt. xxviii. 20). The disciple relation is perpetuated in the apostolate. And more than that, the momentum and resources of the Kingdom are from the unseen. "All power is given unto me in heaven and earth, go ye therefore" (v. 18). The ministry is possible on earth because of the infinite resources of the Son of God on the throne. He is ruler and we are simply ministers of His transmitted powers.

These are the facts or rather the ideas which entered into Christ's institution of the Church, and every theory of the ministry must account for them all. Let us try to take our impression direct from them. Manifestly they teach not so much continuity from one historic beginning, as contact from age to age with one continuous, reigning life. The continuity is in Him and is maintained by Him. He holds the Church of the Ages as He held the disciples, by the magnetism of His person and influence.

As we recall the words of our Lord this character of His Kingdom is profoundly impressed upon the mind. In connection with His resurrection and ascension to the right hand of God, this whole teaching is promulgated. Risen to the throne, He will have henceforth all authority and power residing in Him for His Church. They are in His hand and go forth to service as used and possessed by Him. Their standing is in Him. Their unity and possession of a common life are in Him. And this presence of Christ in His own is to continue unhindered from generation to generation. He guides in their corporate actions, serves Himself of their institutions, uses them to disciple successive generations. But while in this Church giving grace, animating and sustaining her activities, crowning with blessing her ministries, He is in her as sovereign, having authority and power in His own hand, working as He wills to ends vaster than we know.

The Roman view is a materialization of this spiritual truth, which stands alone on foundations peculiar and original,—a conforming of the heavenly Kingdom to earthly kingdoms with their rigid rules of succession. The localizing of grace in the Church so that whatever the character of her ministers, she is the sure imparter of it to those whom she calls and ordains, separates the Church from her Lord as sovereign in her counsels, and sovereign in the gifts of His power. Under that theory He has given away His power to an organization, able at will to command His resources, and with exclusive authority to bring men to Him.

It concerns us, as against this sacerdotal superstition to keep the New Testament doctrine clearly in view. If money be in my purse the same coins cannot at the same time be in yours. But if you have truth, my possession also in no way robs you. Rome with its doctrine of an exclusive authority in her apostolic succession took the material view. Since she had this magical authority, none other could possess it. But as we have seen, that view fatally errs, by falling far beneath the facts of the case.

What constitutes a church is not a property of wonder-working received from another, but the continuous presence of that Other with all who believe in Him and respond to Him. What He thus comes to impart is Himself, His propitiation, His life in God through the Spirit. All are on one level as believers before Him, but as He may please He gives gifts of preaching, teaching, and so forth, to individuals for the profiting of all.

If our idea of the Church, then, be not the Divine dower of priestly power to an order, but the Divine gift of grace to all who believe, and a ministry of service to help on that work of grace in the individual soul, then Christ's informing other communions with His divine presence, does not detract from His presence in our fellowship. Yea, the very fact that in the course of the ages churches have been built up, which though marked by diversity of external type, yet revealed the same graces and powers of spiritual character on the part of the people, only serves to accentuate the power of the risen Christ over men of diverse training and disposition. The manifold divergence does not annihilate the radical oneness, which is on a far loftier plane—being divine—than the separating conceptions of man. Each organization is the teacher of the others in those respects in which it is strong. While through the long historical analysis of separate aspects of truth and polity and method, the generations are taught to realize ever more fully the many-sidedness of the Unity which is to be.

When we have grasped this the evangelical and scriptural view of the Church, we are very apt to fall into the opposite idea that there was nothing whatever special about her officials and ordinances, that they freely developed under the pressure of exigency according to the wisdom given to each particular time. That this principle had large place in the New Testament Kingdom, recent scholars from Hatch to Sabatier have conclusively proved, but that it accounts for the entire institution is false to experience and opposed to the teaching of Jesus Christ. The central office of the Church in the Christian ministry is far from being of that character.

As we have seen, the testimonies of the Gospels support the view that the continuity of the Church is to be secured by ceaseless contact from age to age with one continuous reigning life. "Lo, I am with you alway even unto the end of the world." This being kept ever in view, that the empowering and disposition are in His sovereign hand, then we come to a second great principle. Christ made evident from the beginning that His Kingdom was to continue by a human ministry from age to age. A central act of His own ministry was the calling of His twelve disciples; and the training of these for the work of the apostolate, largely engrossed His time and thought. This ministry is not an historic effect of His appearance and teaching springing up afterward, but a creation of His own, an original element in the institution of His Kingdom.

What did this act of Jesus Christ amount to? Controversy has had the effect of throwing us into exaggeration on one side as on the other, from the evangelical simplicity of this teaching, and so both sides have lost the great spiritual lesson which it should be our aim to recover.

The Protestants were wholly right in their contention against Rome, that in her exclusive sense her priests were not successors of the apostles. The powers which the priests arrogate as successors of the apostles are not such as marked the apostles themselves. The soul of priestism is dominion, the spirit of the apostolate was "not that we have dominion over your faith but are helpers of your joy" (2 Cor. i. 24). Priests teach a mediate approach to God through themselves and the ministries of the Church, the apostles an immediate fellowship with God through faith. "By faith ye stand."

On the other hand by insisting that the ministry of the apostles was wholly exceptional, ordained for a specific object, characterized by exceptional powers of receiving and transmitting a revelation from God, the Protestants conveyed the impression of their own ministries being on another footing in respect of contact with Christ, more distant and mediate as originating through historic channels, and therefore less authoritative than the Roman priesthood professed itself to be. I do not say this was expressly taught, but from the general course of the Protestant argument this is what it worked out to in the judgment of the crowd.

When from these controversial standpoints we fall back on the Gospels, we are in another element, where these controversial standpoints fade away in a simpler and wider truth. What dominates all, as the Gospel day merges in the Apostolic era, is the Son of God crowned with all power, and risen to the throne, that He may be continuously and all-pervasively present in the life of the whole Church from age to age. Thus He receives gifts for men, and imparts them in their distinctive qualities, and for special ends, as the several ages require. The Apostolate, though called to an exceptional ministry, stood on the ground of service like every other order of servant, and their exceptional endowments were gifts for their peculiar service in the dawn of revelation and of the Kingdom.

No more than the ministry of modern days was it their function to stand between Christ and the people as exclusive channels of Divine grace. As a matter of fact they received the revelation of Christ, and personally, or by those who absorbed their influence, wrote out its substance and spiritual content for all men. In this they performed a specific service and became human founders of the New Testament Church. But this, though unexampled, was service to which they were called and for which they were empowered, rendered to the brotherhood as our commoner services are rendered. This did not raise them, nor was it an outward sign of their being raised to a position of intermediacy between Christ and His people, but was service done by Christ to His people through brethren selected and prepared for this task.

That this is the true meaning of their position, is evident from the fact, that in their ministry the ordinary largely mingled with the exceptional. They preached and evangelised, as other men following or called by them. They were empowered to communicate an inspired and spiritually infallible revelation. But they had no brief to set up an inspired and exclusive pattern of ecclesiastical polity, as Moses had been in the wilderness. On this level beyond certain essential principles, arising out of the faith, they used their sanctified judgment like the rest of us. "It is not reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables" (Acts vi. 2). They drew up a reasonable and provisional human compromise at the first council of Jerusalem (Acts xv. 27-29). Apostle withstood apostle in their differing human judgments (Gal. ii. 11). Still in virtue of their peculiar service as the companions of Christ and communicators of revelation, they have their own separate and commanding place, which has only stood forth in stronger relief as the implications of this revelation, and its effects in the world have been more clearly discerned.

The continuity of the Church lies not in the continuity of an order maintained in regular succession from generation to generation. That is an utterly foreign and material idea imposed on the Christian system. We must enter far more fully than any Christian generation has ever done into the fundamental truth that the Church is a spiritual creation, living from generation to generation in the life of the Eternal Risen Son. Nothing exists as the specific basis of the Church but Himself. He calls forth ministries and dispenses with them as seems good to Him. For any single-minded Bible student there is no possible question as to the unique position of the apostolate. These servants on their exceptional plane had done their work as, on their level, the great creed-builders and the reformers performed their task. But He who lived on in the Church and called forth them for their tasks, working within the Church now formed, called forth the sense of needed government and guidance among the companies of believers; and when He had prepared them to welcome such assistance He laid His hand upon individuals whom He had chosen for these tasks. They were not apostles, for the work of the Apostolate was done, but in their own order, and for the work requiring to be done, they were as immediately the choice and appointment of Christ, as the apostles themselves, their empowering was by a charisma of the Spirit, as truly as in the former case.

The Church is as truly a divine institution in the twentieth century as in the first. Christ is her life, and He calls those by whom He may effectuate His will, amid the peculiar circumstances of to-day, as He called the apostles for the task of their day. And we are or should be as immediately His, standing in His hand and power and given to carry out His ideal, as Paul or John felt themselves to be. We are no speculators, discovering and fixing the forms of truth for ourselves, we are no adventurers developing institutions at our own hand; we are not merely institutional servants deriving authority from and simply promulgating the authoritative dogma of the Church. We and the Church derive in common from the Head, and while the Church has liberty to try the spirits whether they be of God, it is ours in the liberty and power of the Spirit to bring the mind of Christ to the Church.

In all this we have stated nothing which goes beyond the accepted teaching of the Protestant Churches. They recognise behind the call of the Church, the individual call of Christ to the ministry. Only as a man is called of God, and has the witness of this within his own spirit, is he worthy to receive the call of a Christian congregation. In some communions, at the ordination service, the minister is asked to give an account of the steps by which God had led him to take up the yoke of the ministry. And the nerve of the fierce contendings for the right of the people to elect their own ministers, is to be found in the conviction that no patron or civil authority can arbitrate in such a case, that only the believing people themselves can discern the man taught of God and specially fitted to meet their spiritual needs. The ecclesiastical arrangements are simply, in the direction of giving effect to this working of Christ in His servants and His people. And then Christ is pleased to work with and through His Church—making her solemn services the channels of His power.

"Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy with the laying on of the hands of the Presbytery" (1 Tim. iv. 14).

There are the very strongest reasons why we should attach the utmost importance to this. In our eagerness for liberty, for the relaxation of all unnecessary restraints, we have become in measure oblivious to essential verities, Christ's continuous presence in the Church, His choice of those, by whom His will shall be made known, and His purposes accomplished from age to age. Because we have not held forth the true authority of the Church and of the Gospel ministry, spurious authority derived from a material apostolic succession, or from connection with the one true Church, founded by Peter, has experienced a calamitous revival in our midst. In comparison with their historic continuity, or unbroken contact with the apostles, we have been made to appear mere adventurers and free lances in the Kingdom of Christ, fighting for our own hand, for so much of Christ's teaching as we are pleased to accept—more concerned to elaborate our own theories and positions, than to let Him work through us, and witness by our spirit-taught testimony of Him from age to age.

For the same reason there has been a strong and growing tendency to take an inadequate view of our ministry. We have deserved to some extent the reproaches which the so-called historic churches have cast upon us. With all our spiritual activities, missionary labours, and fruitfulness in human service, which have been our boast against their pretensions, and our witness to them and to all men that Christ and His Spirit were in us, we have not realised that there is a continuity although not their continuity, and a unity, transcending their material conceptions, but on its spiritual ground more real, thorough-going, far-reaching, than anything which they have dreamed. We have allowed to sink out of view the conception of a Church of Christ, continuous through the inabiding of the risen Christ and the operative Spirit, building up out of all the external companies of the saints a kingdom of redeemed humanity, and to this end seeking to bring the various companies or communions nearer to the heavenly ideal, and thus closer to and in more friendly fellowship with one another.

And so the note of the apostolic ministry is not in ours. We do not yield ourselves to Christ Jesus, for this great Divine whole, to be used by Him for whatever part or section of the whole may seem good to Him, but ever as conserving and building up the whole. "Paul, a sent man of Jesus Christ by the will of God to the Saints which are at Ephesus;" "Paul and Timotheus, servants of Christ Jesus to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi." Such were the superscriptions attached to the Ephesian and Philippian Epistles, carrying the counsels, encouragements, and reproofs of apostles, and of those who were not apostles, like Timothy. They were building up a brotherhood, not merely fencing a creed. They were extending a great historic kingdom in which Jesus Christ dwelt. And they were in the hands of the risen Christ for that end, and by His Spirit were endowed with all-needed insight, to meet the ever multiplying wants of a growing organism.

Of course all this—rightly conceived—is consistent with the intensest individual effort for the salvation and sanctification of believers, and with the boldest initiative in meeting by novel method and organisation the conditions and requirements of a new time. But on the other hand, along with this latter tendency there has grown up a false individualism, which exaggerates distinctions of individual opinion, which encourages separatism, which gathers men into narrow, self-enclosed communions, making not the Divine facts of revelation, but distinctive conceptions regarding particular points and ordinances, the basis of fellowship. Of course all this may be and has been consistent with deep religious earnestness, and much practical fruitfulness. But none the less the general tendency is inevitable, to make a religion of distinctive principles, to place in the foreground corporate interests, to stagnate in a decent performance of religious duty, and to be content with a profession and practice far short of the truly Christian ideals.

And haunting this divisive and individualistic tendency is a constant tendency to naturalism. The falling away to Unitarianism of that Presbyterian Church which was so great in England during the period of the Commonwealth, is an instance of this danger. With every generation, the maintenance of a belief in the supernatural order of things, as against a developed scheme of scientific truth, based upon natural fact, is becoming more difficult. And so when Christians are standing alone, or in inconsiderable sects, in the midst of such a natural enlightenment, there is the strongest tendency on the part of those who have not their fathers' consecration, to tone down the faith in that supernatural order, and to approximate to natural limits. And that tendency is as powerful to-day as in any past time.

The one unquestionable foundation of a supernatural faith is the demonstration of its reality, in a kingdom founded on its principles and living by its light. The supernatural can never be completely vindicated from the ground of the natural. It is an addition to the natural, a revelation superimposed upon the natural. And the highest and only confirmation which is to be sought in the natural, is that it brings in a reconciling harmony, in which all the forces and processes of nature find their sufficient explanation and their fitting goal. To make nature and natural law the standard, and forcibly cramp the supernatural to its limits, is as wrongminded in aim as it must be futile in result. If we have any personal ground then for belief in the supernatural, we must fall back on the divine facts that lie behind all the theologies (which are but the human statement of them) realise anew fellowship with the Son of God in His works of grace, prove His presence by the Spirit in and with the Church, submit to be taught and led by Him, and working with these great divine factors, take our place of service in His great divine Kingdom. That is our only true attitude to a supernatural system. And thus standing in the hand of God and proving His power, we have, in orders of spiritual and social fact, unquestioned and unquestionable demonstrations of reality, which deliver us from all further necessity of establishing the truth of Christianity. The necessity is rather imposed upon those who confine themselves to the natural, to explain how on their principles these things could be. Why! herein is a marvellous thing—in men like you who profess to know everything—that ye know not whence Christ is and yet He hath opened mine eyes. (John ix. 30.)

Our work then is, not as mere successors of anybody, but in as immediate contact with Christ as the Apostles themselves, and called by Him for our specific task, as they were called for theirs, to be His sent men, advancing the kingdom. We have dwelt, it may seem, at undue length on our views of the ministry, because we believe that on many grounds it is of the utmost importance to realise our immediate relation to Christ, and the fact that we are being sustained and sent by Him. Through the submission of our wills that thence accrues, Christ comes into His Church afresh to guide and inspire His people for a present service; and on our part we can count on having with us the witness and power of His Spirit, testifying in human hearts that we are His ambassadors, working His spiritual wonders by our hands.

But further, we are led into a view of our Christian ministry very different from what obtains at present, and which comes into the heart of the subject which we are discussing in these lectures. The idea is far too prevalent that the regular ministry of the Church exists mainly for the culture of Christian people, for the maintenance of the organised activities of the Church, and that aggressive work, whether in dealing with the careless and indifferent or in making a stand against social evil and error, is to be undertaken by outside evangelistic and other agencies. But the futility of this conception is becoming every day more apparent. The centre of aggression should be the Church herself. Through all her ministries of teaching and training there should run the most powerful aggressive note. She exists to advance, to claim in each age the new generation for Christ, and so to nurture her people that they shall be helpers in pressing that claim, and themselves the best commendation of that claim. If she be thus on fire with her world-mission, all her out-branchings of activity will partake of that expansive spirit. While if the Church be quiescent, maintaining rather than extending her position, her home evangelisation will only touch as at present those already convinced, and her foreign missions, after the first outburst of enthusiasm, will settle down amid abounding heathen populations, to the staid ways and the slow progress of home.

The view that we have taken of Christ's immediate relation to those whom He has called in every generation, has a further happy consequence. It enables us to utilise with discernment, and yet for great practical profit, the teaching of Matt. x. The general consideration which should govern us in interpreting this passage, is—the plan of Jesus was and is to carry forward His Kingdom by human ministries suited to the conditions of succeeding ages. This is how He charged in the case of His first servants, the Apostles, in their peculiar place. And further, it is to be noted that this is His charge to them not in respect of what distinguished their ministry from all others, the receiving and delivering of a revelation, but about the duties of their ministry which were common to them with all teachers and preachers of Christ.

This being the case, then, we may conclude that although time and place and even the progress of the kingdom may introduce alterations as to details, yet these counsels in essentials must have the closest bearing on all who are called of Christ for service. As to alterations in detail, we find them in regard to the disciples themselves at different times of their lives. They who were at first commanded to confine themselves to the lost sheep of the house of Israel, after the resurrection of Christ received the widely differing charge. "Ye shall be witnesses unto me . . . unto the uttermost ends of the earth." (Acts i. 8.) He who in the beginning enjoined "Provide neither gold nor silver nor brass in your purses, nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes nor yet staves" (Matt. x. 9, 10), afterwards enjoined "But now he that hath a purse let him take it and likewise his scrip, and he that hath no sword let him sell his garment and buy one." (Luke xxii. 36.)

The lesson from all this however, is not that the circumstances being dissimilar, the charge is inapplicable, but the very different and far more comforting one, that Christ charged for that generation in its characteristic individuality, because He would be with each generation in the distinguishing features of its time, counselling and ordering. The Spirit would be present in each generation to guide as to the particular exigencies of that time ; but the central lessons would abide ever the same. Let us with all brevity gather those thoughts of the Master as to all ministry for Him. The (1) first great lesson for us to learn is our immediate relation to the risen King in this service, and His presence with us. "These twelve Jesus sent forth and charged them saying" (v. 5). No man is fit to be used until not only is he called, but taken into the secret of the Master's counsel, and so bound to specific ministry as the Lord has illumined, that henceforth he bears the Lord's charge. Christ's presence in His Church is far more intimate and sovereignly controlling than most have awakened to discern.

Then (2) choosing His own servants and training them for Himself, He sends them out amid the confusions and reactions of each generation, with a fresh vision of the unchanging word, fitted to awaken new and sublime hopes for men. In this world, where the mass of men have totally missed life's good and the best have not attained, the Church comes to say, the Kingdom of Heaven (v. 7)—the ideal of all good for you—is at hand. When the Church or the individual preacher cannot make the world's heart ring amid the felt desolation of the present, with that vision of hope, then this is true, that man or Church is not living in the close, continuous fellowship of Christ and speaking as charged by Him.

But (3) not only is Christ in and with the preacher giving and firing His message, He is leading those who defer to Him, as to place and manner and time. It is His will to be the general in the campaign. How many enterprises have been fruitless because ordered by human wisdom according to natural probability. On the other hand, even in these last generations, what wonders have been wrought by those who waited on Christ and took His way! It is most interesting to notice how in all this Christ draws His servants so near to Himself. At that time He was arousing men by miracle, to realize that a divine messenger had come to destroy the disorders of the world by divine power, so as to awaken their sere hearts to higher hopes. And Christ gives to them to repeat these wonders.—Heal the sick cleanse the lepers, etc., (v. 8). And what He gives to you and me, as we yield ourselves to Him, is what He feels to be His own message for the actual hour.

"The works that I do shall ye do also and greater works than these shall ye do because I go to the Father." (John xiv. 12.)

So much for the presence of Christ with His own. Note (4) the authoritative character of this ministry. We do not go in our own names nor claim acceptance in the measure of our own worth. We dare not leave out the element of authority with which we are invested, carrying Christ's message in dependence on His continual guiding. These earliest immature workers went to every place as the messengers of the King. They watched the response of the people as indicating their attitude to the Master. They trusted themselves to the love of the people. There was One with them who could make return for every pulse of natural kindness. And in all these impulses of their hearers there were deeper forces at work, winning men in those simple acts to a deeper love, a higher unselfishness. We are not leaning on Christ, we are not living wholly for the glory of Christ, if we do not feel that He is with us discovering men in the response of their hearts to us, that in His grace and power we may get close to them for encouragement and rebuke.

(5). The spiritual endowment of this ministry. We are sent out into a hostile world—as sheep in the midst of wolves. In every age there is the unsubdued hostility blossoming out now into one extremity of evil, now into another. In these unforeseen hostile conditions the servant is to have no fear. He is under no necessity of searching out precedents. One who can sound to the depth every variable element of the new time, will give to him who leans upon God, the answer of the moment for the moment, not a human expedient but the Spirit of the Father speaking through His servant, the irrevocable word (v. 20). Indeed amid conflicts and exigencies and out-flamings of hatred incalculable, holding on in faith the servant of Christ shall escape and prevail.

(6). The obscurations of evil that fall on this ministry. A disciple is not above his master. His testimony will meet continually every artifice of evil to nullify its influence and pervert men. If Christ was called Beelzebub, nothing that can blacken our testimony will be withheld. Fear them not, says Christ, in a magnificent courage. Trust the sifting and searching of time. There is nothing covered that shall not be revealed (v. 26)—neither the craft of the false, nor the rounded verity of the true. And do not trim; "what you have learned of me in the deeps of your soul, speak out as truth, in the light of universal human knowledge." It will stand every test of reality. And for yourselves, if you have fear, let it only be of playing false, and falling under the power of evil. For yourselves have no fear, the very hairs of your head are all numbered (v. 30).

But (7) This ministry will send a sword on the earth. God's truth for man's salvation will rouse all varieties of rejection and response, all degrees of difference among those who respond, and thus new elements of division will permeate all relations of life (vv. 34, 35). And this fiery searching of the truth will create the fiercest moral tests for the witnesses. Some will compromise to win the favour of the worldly, others will assert false liberties to please those who irk the full Christian restraint. They who would be faithful witnesses must postpone all earthly joys and even life, to the discharge of this duty. This will mean cross-bearing, if we would be worthy of our Lord. The issues are of life and death, and God will weigh in His balances kinds and degrees of reward.

Such, according to this great testimony of Matt. x., is the magnificent scope of Christ's institution of witness, founded by the Apostles, continued by Him from age to age, in the call of ever fresh witnesses, and through them of a believing people. We have to enlarge our ideas of the Church then, rather than confine them, to widen our congregational scope so as to include those aggressive ministries with which I chiefly deal. Still when we have entered fully into the idea of Christ it must be recognised that there are Exceptional Ministries called into being for a time, and ending with the time.

(*B.*) Let us deal then very briefly with these Exceptional Ministries. It would demand somewhat lengthened treatment to present Christ's view of all the activities which would arise because of the presence of His Gospel and Kingdom in the world. Here, as often elsewhere, we are overwhelmed at the superhuman discernment of Christ. He saw that these would so strike into the heart of the world's life, that many movements of human thought would flock like birds to their branches, (Mat. xiii. 32), that individuals would have all sorts of trains of thought started by the impact of His spirit, and in the largeness of His heart He said, "He that is not against us is on our part." (Mark x. 40.) But while welcoming the outcome of all these activities He does not commit Himself to them.

He assumed as a matter of course, the spontaneous testimony of all believing souls. He honoured the silent witness in act of the woman that was a sinner, and of Mary the sister of Martha and Lazarus. To the man delivered of the legion, He said, "Go home to thy friends and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee." (Mark v. 19.) Yea, such testimony was so natural and spontaneous, that He was more concerned to repress unsuitable testimony, than to urge to its exercise.

With regard to this important and pertinent subject, there is one passage singularly fruitful. In the second of the great series of parables recorded in Matt. xiii., we read the good seed, the vital germs of further growth, are the children of the Kingdom. (v. 38.) In a later parable He compares them to a leaven, each grain setting in ferment other grains. And still again, in the vital mass of believers constituting the Kingdom of God, there grows up a law of structure, as from the mustard seed; because of the life of love which is in them they naturally form into an organised whole. And to this organised brotherhood, God by the Spirit gives His charismata as we see fully developed in the later teaching of Paul. (1 Cor. xii.) Thus the called and ordained ministry is a specialised and peculiarly endowed form, of that common subjection and service which each believer as such owes to His Lord, called and furnished by the Lord for the instruction, defence, and maintenance of His church from age to age.

There is an account, specially given by Luke (x. 1-20), of an exceptional ministry appointed at a time of great interest, which is very suggestive. We allude to the mission of the Seventy. These were not in any sense permanent officers.

Appointed for this task, they gave in their account, and apparently stepped back into the ranks of the membership. In external form the charge, so far as it goes, is not dissimilar to the more elaborate charge to the Twelve. Yet we hold it to be manifestly distinct. Jesus is about to take His last missionary journey to Jerusalem before the feast of Tabernacles. Much appears to turn on that progress. It might be that there would be a great ingathering. It was wise to make provision for either event. And so He sent them "two and two into every city and place whither He Himself would come." (x. 6.) Afterwards He speaks of them as babes in Christ, but they were to go in His power for this specific task. And all the more for their very weakness, His power went with them. "He that heareth you heareth me; and he that rejecteth you rejecteth me; and he that rejecteth me rejecteth Him that sent me." (v. 16.)

What the actual issue of this ministry was we cannot very accurately determine. Jesus realised that the harvest to be reaped, now or later, truly was great. But as plainly there were hostile elements of many kinds. Unbelief had closed many hearts against Him in Galilee, unbending hostility was to meet Him in Jerusalem. Still there were also powerful believing currents, and

Jesus would draw them to a head and make them ready for His ministry.

Sometimes a mighty work of conviction is done without great outward results, "and the Seventy returned with joy." (v. 12.) The power working with them achieved greater victories than they had been called to win, "Lord, even the devils are subject unto us in Thy name." (v. 17.) And in these Jesus saw a prophecy of His own triumph. For He is ever with His people, and takes encouragement from their successes. "I beheld Satan as lightning fallen from heaven." (v. 18.) And then since, though their special mission was done, their work of witness would only end with life, He gave to them perhaps the most magnificent assurance of triumph vouchsafed during His earthly ministry. "I have given you authority to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and over all the powers of the enemy; and nothing shall in any wise hurt you." (v. 19.)

Christ is sovereign in His own Church. It hath pleased Him to work through great continuous organisations, and by men regularly called and appointed to ministry. But He is free to step aside, when it pleases Him, and all through the centuries He has laid hands on elect souls, clothed them with His power, sent them forth to specific tasks, and oftentime has conferred on them faith and spiritual courage, and achieved by them results, that have been an example and an inspiration to the whole Church of God. "No flesh must glory in His presence." No office or organisation must arrogate an independent authority, or put themselves between Christ and the soul as necessary to salvation. They are only means, and if Christ is pleased ordinarily to work through them, He can work apart from them at His good pleasure. Christ is all and in all.

CHRIST'S IMMEDIATE AIM: THE AWAKENING OF FAITH

VII

CHRIST'S IMMEDIATE AIM: THE AWAKENING OF FAITH

In the light of all that we have laid down, we now come to the immediate dealing of Christ with men. We have grown up within Christian influences, accustomed to Christian methods, and so are little able to recognise their originality and the remarkable insight and depth of view which they display. In such regions of truth as this we attain to fresh vision and power, not by going away from Christ's revealed will, but by sinking deeper into the unplumbed treasures of the divine thought.

Note the originality of Christ. No one in the whole history of time ever spoke to man from this standpoint. Here He stands on a plane absolutely alone, as manifestly above all human levels in His method, as in the substance of His revelation. He does not, after the manner of the philosophers, begin by relating men to the system of things surrounding them, and so lead them out to God, and discover their relation to Him. It is very significant to note, as discovering the relation of the ministry of Jesus to the general thought movement of the world, that He leaves that whole region of human exploration to stand where it was, and went forward into a higher field, where He was going to make anew even the crowning contribution of time. He does not, like the ancient teachers of the east, demonstrate finite nothingness, and urge men to absorption in the divine. And still more remarkable He does not even, like His own apostle Paul, begin by demonstrating human sinfulness, and so shut men up to absolute dependence on another. Do not misunderstand me, I am speaking of His immediate method, not of the ultimate outcome of His mission. I am not of those who think that there is a discrepancy between Jesus and Paul. They wrought to exactly the same issue. The outcome of Christ's dealing with men was that they had no cloak for their sin.

More simply, more immediately as one who was truly man, dealing with men, He spoke to the spirit in man. What we are only beginning to discern as a psychologic fact, looking back we can see that Christ fully recognised. As man has a whole region in him looking out to the external world, and reducing to knowledge what the senses have discovered to the soul, so there is another region in man which looks out to God. May I be permitted on this point to quote some words from a paper of my own delivered as a Murtle Lecture before Aberdeen University. The subject was "The Ascendency of the Spiritual in Recent Thought." "The spiritual is a distinct sphere of the human soul moving from within, having its own organ of knowledge, its own objects, its own method, its own results. As the senses are a fundamental endowment of the being, looking out to the external world, so the personality has faculties moral and spiritual, which have immediate affinities with the spiritual world, which receive impressions from that world, and which become powers in the life through these impressions. The sense of the right, the thirst for a chief good, the instinct of dependence, the strong propension of the reason to find a moral and religious meaning girdling the course of events, are—roughly and popularly speaking—elements of that spiritual side.

"Now though these powers use reason in their later stages and can always vindicate themselves in the courts of reason, they do not work by reasoning. They leap instinctively into exercise by the contact of the personality with another and higher personality. Face to face with the Christ, men had no cloak for their sins. The moral nature within them leaped up in witness irresistible to the rightness of the right as discoverable by Him. When He revealed love as the source and end of all, when God stood unveiled in His purpose of love, and the great outline of the Kingdom of God, as sketched by Jesus, took possession of them,—men's natures instinctively opened to the light. Great and small, learned and simple, whatever they might do with them—receive or reject—found a witness in themselves to these unveilings, a deep assent of inalienable faculties of their own being which had hitherto been dormant. And these results of conviction and hope were not by reason, but from instinctive impressions in the sphere of the moral and spiritual."

In addition to these general principles we must keep in view the considerations advanced in the third lecture. We have not here simply the naked impression of personality on personality. We learn from Dr Martineau the leading place which that has to play in all moral advance. But in Christ we have a perfect personality absolutely free from stain, living in an immediate consciousness of union with God, and with this there was also a flooding of the divine spirit, which made immediately and powerfully communicable to others what reigned within His own soul. He did not need to fix doctrinal positions. He shone. God, a personal Spirit, holy, loving, gleamed forth in His consciousness of them. Yea more, His disciples saw Him, who as man was one of themselves, in the very sunshine of this divine communion, and revealing in the calm rapture and obedience of His life, as in a transparency, the glory of the Eternal God. That a personality thus crowned with divine favour should make a profound impression is what might be expected. But what Jesus watched for amid the notes of joy, wonder, conviction of sin, and the conflict of debate, was for the unextinguished sense of God in man. He did not judge men by the common standards of position, professional religious reputation, or even exterior decency. All men had sinned, and where that was a fact, the degrees of appearance were in no sense decisive. All men had sinned, but in whom was there still alive and unstifled the sense of God, of the soul's need of Him, which might be fanned into a flame.

He thus kept knocking at the bottom door of the soul, by what He was as well as by what He did, by works of power no less than by touches of human sympathy. He knew that God was working with Him. The tendency of sin is God-disowning, to stifle the soul's very, ultimate, sense of dependence on another. God has been drawing where any yearning is manifest; Jesus takes hearts that open as those whom the Father has given. And still He throws the net wide, "Whosoever will let him take the water of life freely." He makes no account of degrees of sin. "Who has the open, who has the opener heart?" The past is dead and done with. The Lamb of God, as John said, is going to take away the sins of the whole world. To arbitrate between varying measures of sin, where all were involved in a common charge and need, would decide nothing. The one point was, is there anything restorable, to which by any and every art God can make appeal?

Here we reach absolute blinding mystery. How, where all have sinned some should respond, while others do not, we cannot tell. None come without the Father, the Son could not welcome all, unless He knew the Father willed them to come. This leads us down into obscure regions of the personality whither we cannot follow. It is very instructive to notice Christ Himself acknowledging limits in the humanly knowable, clearly recognising on the one hand that in His whole personality He is grappling with the deepest in man; that everything depends on whether men freely and voluntarily respond; and more, that what they are in very essence is discovered in that act; yet on the other hand, bowing to the fact that beyond these plain ethical issues which nothing could interfere with, are mysteries of divine sovereignty to be acknowledged even where they cannot be explained. If Christ left that mystery there, surely we may.

If anywhere we feel our need of a baptism of Christ's spirit, and an entrance into some measure of His communion with the Father, it is surely here, Do we not need also,—engaged as we are in a wrestling with human souls, which has its aspect of impenetrable mystery—a consciousness that we are in the hand of God, that He is working in, and working with us, to the fulfilment of His design. But passing these considerations, let us proceed to deal with typical cases in which Christ comes actually into contact with human beings, in the endeavour to awaken faith within their seared hearts. (*A.*) To begin with let us deal with representations to be found in the Synoptic Gospels. And (*B.*) let us go forward to the more sustained and far-seeing views to be found in John's Gospel.

(*A.*) Illustrations from the Synoptic Gospels.

And (1) notice the boldness with which He responded to the vilest and worst. He fell back of all our categories, and took in all classes and degrees of sinners. In every human being as such there was the image of God blurred but not defaced. Not a son or daughter of Adam but has such a witness of God, that each knows himself or herself a wandered sheep from the fountain of being. And so Christ makes appeal to this inherent sense, no matter where the possessor may be. And where there is a response however limited, what a royal welcome each receives. He says to the penitent thief, "To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." (Luke xxiii, 43.)

For the woman that was a sinner he put in the plea, "she hath loved much;" to her He said, "Thy faith hath saved thee." (Luke vii. 49, 50.) He had an unapproached sense of the worth of human nature as made by God, and knew that He was speaking to that in men which must respond, whatever their choice might be. He was blind to our distinctions, and travailed for a murderer on His cross, for a town drab in her shame, with an almost matchless subtlety and zeal. And He waited for the awakening in their souls of the sense of God, with as patient and subtle endeavour as in the case of Peter and John.

Nowhere are we further away from Christ than at this point. We are far too professional—and, living in civilization, we have adopted its standard of judgment regarding men. I mean that unconsciously and involuntarily we are governed by this. And the standard of judgment in civilization is a property standard. The cheapest of all cheap entities are the unemployed masses in town and country, and the shiftless multitudes who have lost the basal habit of industry and are sunk utterly below the self-subsistence level. They are worth nothing in the popular view, yea a purely negative quantity, being a burden on industry and property. And as men remove from this standard, and by muscle or brain vindicate a position for themselves, they rise in value.

Even for the material ends of a temporal civilization that is a blunder. But a Church can only live by ceaseless protests against this, by showing that with her Lord she regards the personality of man to be of an infinite worth, as compared with the measure of temporal good, and by actually laying her plans to bring human beings without distinction of circumstances into the Kingdom. Our Lord elected to live at the base, on the plane of poverty, that He might be level to the needs of the poorest. Whether that is called for or would be wise, in the existing circumstances of the Church within the modern state, may fairly enough be matter of wholly sincere discussion. The labourer is worthy of his hire. And if voluntarily from love a community out of her abundance pours her treasures into the hand of the Church, then God can consecrate that benevolence on the part of the people to be a blessing to the Church, making it the means of fuller equipment and expansion.

But whenever amid the fluctuations of spiritual zeal and love, a Church has reached a standard of comfort and general expenditure, which makes it necessary that her dominant note of appeal should be for self-maintenance, she becomes a dependent on the moneyed classes, and the tendency of the poorer classes is to drift into isolation if not revolt. The ministry of the Church becomes a ministry to those who can support ordinances. In other words the Church has succumbed so far to the standards of the civilization in which she lives. True the leaven of Christ in her will never allow her to fall to this. And so she makes efforts to reach the poorest. But these efforts are merely appendages to what is regarded as her main mission, made to conscious inferiors, and pervaded by doles and treats far beyond the brink of necessity, to keep them in pleased subjection to their betters. That is the general situation to-day. Of course there are numerous consecrated souls, oblivious to the surface distinctions of men, working in a spirit far more closely conformed to the ideal of the Master. But that is the aspect which the activity of the Church presents on the whole and to the world at large.

These last paragraphs may appear a digression, but they go to the centre of the mission problem. Until we come to Christ's view of man as man, realise the capacity for the divine, lurking in every human soul, steadily discern, looking past the shows of time, that the jewel in all men of infinite worth is just this buried potentiality of being recovered to the fellowship of God; and that in this connection rags or royal robes, a cubicle in a lodging-house, or a suburban villa, or for that of it a ducal palace, are to be considered just as they are hindering or helping to this spiritual consummation. If we were with Christ on that plane, if we compelled men by all our acts to see that we were on that plane, would we not reach the common heart? Would there not ensue a truer sense of the inherent worth and dignity of man, and would not an arrest be laid on the blind and voracious worldliness of the present day, which would reverberate with power on every social scale?

The bare mention of these things discovers how far we have fallen even from the level of former times, and how profoundly we require a baptism into the spirit of Jesus Christ. How we may rise in these respects to a realisation of that spirit, and give full effect to them in our organised church life, are questions full of difficulty. But these lectures are addressed to young and uncommitted lives in preparation for the ministry, and it is of the first importance to such, frankly to realise the failures of the past, and carefully consider our unrealised Christian ideals.

(2) Notice the secret of Christ's boldness. Spiritual truth is subject to depravation more than any other species of verity. Because it is highest, subtlest, and most inclusive, men are apt to interpret it in terms of lower truth. How did He, the clearest, calmest seer of the ages, with His eye on the ultimate good which He wished to impart, feel free to throw Himself on all classes and conditions of men, and respond with such fulness to the feeblest uprising of faith?

We do not ask this in the hard and legal prudence of deistic times. We must trust ourselves to men if we would be trusted, we must love to be loved. Our question is how could Christ magnetise men and raise them to the level on which He would meet them? There is such room for misapprehension. Men respond to religious appeals on all sorts of levels, thirsting to escape consequences, animated by an alarmed self-interest, merely dominated by passing fear, goaded by guilt, without a whole-hearted resolve to have done with evil the cause of guilt. But it is impossible to portray the Protean shapes of human spirits, amid the shadows of evil awakened to anxiety and fear. Many teachers deliberately hold back from pressing the grace of God in Christ, as an immediate reason why men should turn and believe, because of the mixed elements which enter into every revival movement, and the frequent disappointment and failure which ensue. They preach truth, they discover the scriptural conditions of a saved and sanctified character, and leave the truth to make its own impression on men. Thus, however, they are only fulfilling half their mission. An ambassador makes much of the honour and dignity of his master who has sent him, pleads for the reception of his master's proposals, and if they are rejected, departs. And God, besides giving the scriptures, calls living servants, that in the burning consciousness of the reality and preciousness of the message which they bring, they may speak, and that with God's authority they may invite, entreat, command men to receive. "As though God did beseech you by us," says Paul, "we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled unto God." (2 Cor. v. 10.) "We received grace and apostleship for obedience to the faith among all nations." (Rom. i. 5.)

Whatever the difficulties, we may not shirk the duties. We must put ourselves in the breach as the commissioned servants of Christ, to awaken faith, and deal directly with men about their relation to the living God. And the secret of our strength lies, where our Master's lay, in a personal holiness which rebuked sin, while it discovered Divine love; and in a filial passion for the glory of God, which in Christ's ministry ever drew sinners past mere blessings, even when He dwelt on them, to God as the one object of the soul, to the life in God as the true life, to the glory of God as the one sufficient end in all. But even beyond that, let us rise to the solitary greatness and majesty of this work. Here we have the conflict of light with darkness in the soul. All the subtle influences of evil are arrayed against the good. And not only do we require that holiness and filial passion for God, to set our message in the true light, but the illumination of the Holy Spirit to give our words carrying power, and to plant the living truth in human hearts over against every subtle twist and perversion of evil. And so we are called to raise a direct issue in the light and power of God, right round the whole circle of the personal spirit of man, at every point where appeal may be made for God as against evil. Such is the apparatus of grace, if I may so speak, for reducing a human soul, and in the centre of that, placed by God, the preacher is an essential human factor.

(3) Let us now consider somewhat more discursively what is included in Christ's immediate aim—the appeal to and awakening of faith. The objection is sometimes raised that it is incredible that man's everlasting welfare should necessarily be bound up with a belief in certain ultra-rational doctrines and principles, about which men may have divergent views, or regarding which they may see fit to abstain from having any positive opinions. And many whom reverence might retain from going so far, are puzzled to find faith made the central requirement, and not character and conduct. The religion of Christ claims to reveal the absolute ethical ideal, and to have the sole power of bringing men into complete conformity with that ideal. And many are stumbled at the assertion that they can only come into this heritage by an act of positive allegiance to a personal Christ.

We shall find the complete answer to these difficulties, and along with that a new insight into the profundity of Christ's method, by studying in detail two instances where Christ specially commends the act of faith. And first the remarkable case of the centurion (Matt. viii. 5-13). This was a friendly heathen who stood outside the covenant people. The hopes and promises of the Old Testament, which predisposed the Jews to expect a Messiah, and which shut up many to Jesus as the Messiah because of His evident fulfilment of them, were simply non-existent for him as a Gentile. The problem of life existed for Him as for other men, and he had evidently thought seriously over it. Loyal to all the facts before him, including the fact of his own personality, he believed in an intelligent government of this universe. And taking as an illustration the analogy nearest him, he conceived of an organised government like that of Rome.

All that he had, before he came into touch with Christ, and might have continued to possess, if he had never come. Faith in him was something more and deeper. When he saw, endowed with powers which were evidently from God, one who appealed to what was highest in him—mercy and goodness being on a scale that made him shrink from entering such a presence—then by what we can only call a spiritual intuition, he rose to the conviction, that in this man was a discovery of the divine. Jesus might only be an emissary of the central authority, but He revealed Him and acted for Him, and as in an organised state all things obeyed that holy will.

Essentially he went for the highest right and good he knew, witnessed to his soul by Christ, apart from, despite of every other consideration, embraced it, followed it, drew upon it, assured that that could never fail. That was his faith viewed in its ethical core, and surely you discern how fundamental and far reaching it was. Only from such an embracing of essential good as ultimate in the universe, can the loftiest ethical life spring. And whatever further experiences may follow this act of God's free grace such as pardon, justification, sonship, which of course must be formulated in doctrines, yet the primary act is of the nature I have described—the depths of the being turning to the light, leaning their whole weight on perfect goodness in God, discovered in Christ. I shall yet bring out in subsequent sections the centrality of this decision in relation to the whole sum of human experiences. But even as we leave the matter now, do we not see the fundamental character of Christ's quest, and of the issue which he forces upon men.

Take now the case of the Syrophenician woman —recorded by Matthew and Mark. Though outside the circle of the covenant people, she asks that the demon may be cast out of her daughter. Here we have not so reasoned a faith as that of the centurion. But we have a more remarkable surmounting of all barriers, and at the end a victorious leap of trust which has scarce a parallel in the Gospel story. The barrier lies in the restriction divinely imposed upon the mission of Christ. "I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel." (Matt. xv. 24.) Here were power and will to heal manifestly from God, and yet here also from God was this rule barring her out. Christ makes her feel this to the full—first of all, not answering, then declaring the limits of His mission, then almost in the language and seemingly in the spirit of a Jew, putting the matter crudely, bluntly so as to inflict pain. "It is not meet to take the children's bread and cast it unto dogs." (v. 26.)

Nothing more beautiful was ever uttered by human lips, or welling up from a profounder deep of faith. "Truth, Lord." She bows before the sovereign will. He has a right to do what pleases Him with His own. He may exalt some and conserve for them peculiar privileges, and leave others comparatively in the place of outcasts or dogs. But God would not make a dog for whom He would not make some provision. He is not force or evil but good, and He would have some consideration for the least creature He made. Thou, Lord, hast made me feel this as never before, and in my misery I appeal to that consideration in the Divine heart. The centurion learned of Christ that the good was supreme and trusted it. The woman went straight to the heart of God, of which she had caught a glimpse in Christ, and founded her plea on the goodness that was in Himself.

Now to travel no farther, in these instances do we not see that Christ spoke to the deepest depth of each one, and drew forth a central transfiguring decision, that must henceforth colour all they were. He came not to condemn the world but to save. His question ever was, (assuming sin), is there anything in this man or this woman which might be drawn back into the recognition and love of God? If there was, and it responded, then His whole being went out in love to that soul in the dawn of faith. In that opening eye, that feebly beating heart, Christ saw the possibility of life eternal. If as in the case of the woman that was a sinner, one turned with the whole heart in an outburst of eager desire, Christ saw a soul utterly impatient of bondage, and held her up as a superior, before the dignified Pharisee, who allowed his dignity of place and pride of attainment, to bridle and repress the new and deeper hunger after God.

And to Him the sin of all sin, inclusive of all other sins and transcending them, was this, that evil had sapped in so far, as to kill the last trace of belief in any meaning of goodness in the universe. When in utter heartless unbelief, men turned a deaf ear to the very glory of God discovered in the Son, when they pursued their own pleasures and interests unmoved, the woe of a further and final separation fell on them. When by every trick and seeming argument they tried to justify the unbelief that was founded on confirmed hostility to good—Christ said, to paraphrase His words (Matt. xvi. 4), You want a sign, you will never get any other but the sign of Jonah, for God will not satisfy those who have played false with moral conviction. You will see the Son of God crucified, dead, buried, at your hands, and raised by the power of God, and will know yourselves gone out into the final apostacy.

(*B.*) Illustrations from St. John's Gospel. Having by no means exhausted, but fairly stated, the view of Christ's immediate aim given in the Synoptics, I advance to pursue the same inquiry in the Gospel according to John.

One is glad to find that there are significant signs of a return, on the part of recent scholars, to stricter views of the historicity and the authorship of the fourth Gospel. The Johannine problem, as it has been agitated for more than half-a-century, has never been a vital problem for me. I can understand how approaching the subject from the literary or theological points of view, men should have been struck with the very different compasses of the Synoptics on the one hand, and John on the other. With whatever exceptional elements, the centre of the Synoptics is Palestine, and we have the story of Christ's earthly manifestation. With whatever fragments of human history, the centre of St. John is in the first verse, "the word was with God and the word was God" conjoined with that other "and the word was made flesh."

Now if we but calmly think of the matter, it is the easiest thing in the world to make the Synoptics the standard, and by how much John's Gospel differs, treat it as wrought up with fancies, or corrupted by speculation on the facts. And we know how much of the reasoning has gone on that superficial assumption. And difficulties about authorship have risen largely—I do not say exclusively,—from the same thought, that we have superimpositions of some sort on the original tradition, which must have lain within Synoptic lines, or cruder limits still.

Now manifestly this is "tendency" criticism, which is bent on reducing to the lowest limits the phenomena presented in the Gospels, either with a hostile intent, or with a friendly intent, to lessen what many regard as the difficulties of faith.

But if we have accepted Christ's testimony regarding Himself, and have met Him frankly on His own spiritual level, where the supernatural is evidenced to us in the depths of our spiritual experience, we have no concern to lower and minimize the facts. We rather desire to exhaust their full content. A revelation introducing us into a new world of being must have exceptional elements, not to be explained by natural and ordinary analogies, in its historic foundations. We must deal with the facts as they lie before us, taking the light they bring, and only explaining them away or modifying them, when we are baffled in the attempt to take a consistent and reasonable meaning out of the facts as they lie. The reign of extreme theories must sooner or later come to an end, through exhaustion of conflicting suppositions, and then the facts in their setting of creative circumstances will be suffered to tell their own tale.

Suppose that we look at this problem strictly from within, that is from the central aim animating Christ, on the one hand in the Synoptics, on the other in John. This is what all the Gospels set out to give us, the inner consciousness of Jesus calling men to faith. Now in the portraiture of Christ as the anointed of God and Saviour of man, the Synoptics and John are one. At least the note of personality is identical. His consciousness of the Father, and His practical aim, are the same in both. The later Gospel is fragrant of an individual experience, and at many points as vividly rooted in concrete external fact as Mark itself. In all these respects there is nothing to show that John's is less the record of an eye witness than the others, or that the record has become blurred and vague through the distance of time. Wherein lies the difference then? Not at all in the free play of human fancies or ideas upon facts, but in the falling of the image of the Son of God on a lens of greater compass, on a more profound intuitive discernment, in the person of John. Can one read with open mind the Gospel called by his name, and not remark these three characteristics, a sanctity which would regard the substitution of his dreams for verities as an unpardonable sin, a consciousness of possessing and stating the central facts as they occurred, and an overmastering feeling that it is well to be perfectly explicit since so much hangs on the facts?

True, these facts passed through his singularly keen and capacious spirit; as experience grew, they unfolded themselves in their magnitude and in their inherent relations to man and to God; and the courses of the Church's history in His long life would throw lights upon them. But surely it is one thing to see the bearings of a fact, and another thing to throw imaginative films round a fact.

When Sir Isaac Newton carried the principle displayed in the falling apple up into the relations of planets, he was only seeing more deeply into the great law exemplified in falling apples and rolling worlds. Through the Holy Spirit John entered into the thought of Jesus and explored the full content of His self-revelation in act and word, so that all Christ did, stood for Him and for His readers within the larger scope of His sovereign aim. But all that meant an entering into fact, a presentation of the facts in their apprehended bearing, in no sense an addition of fancy to fact.

Of all this we have a very remarkable example in following into the Gospel of John the line of study which we have pursued through the Synoptics. We have considered Christ's immediate aim—the awakening of faith, how in contact with all sorts and conditions of men He sought to call forth faith, and also how central and ultimate that decision was. Now in this as in so many other points, the Synoptics, so far from being complete in themselves, drop us on the edge of a great mystery. Here is something manifestly beyond the human, but beyond that plane what does it amount to in the plan of God's self-revelation and in the universe of created things. Facts like these cannot simply be left in the air, while we use them for our private ends. Were John's Gospel left out, there would be an unbridgeable gap in the New Testament. We could not explain the developed spiritual consciousness of St Paul, nor the articulated system in the great Christian creeds. John, in virtue of his full vision of the Christ in the patient meditation of long years, supplies the keystone to the New Testament. Therefore whoever wrote this book—even if it could be proved not to be John the Apostle—it must be held to be the work of an eye-witness and of the one who saw furthest into the Christ.

But let us turn to our special point. To those who have sunk furthest into the message of the Synoptics, every word in this later Gospel comes as the revealed answer to irresistible queries. Who is this who appeals to the deepest in man, drawing out these uprisings to the divine? John advances on the true plane from the beginning. This is the only begotten from the bosom of the Father declaring Him. "Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world" (John i. 29). God is moving out in Him to self-revelation. A kingdom is to be set up, into which man can only enter by the quickening of the Spirit. And here lies the secret of that searching into the deeps of the human soul to which all the Synoptics bear witness. There has come to the world the great judgment hour of opportunity. The shadows of the partial have vanished. God in His essential glory of love is unveiled amid a world perishing by the serpent bite of sin. And the great issue is raised for every man now that he has seen the essential good, will he allow that Infinite love to deliver him from the bondage of the evil and lift him into eternal life with Himself? (John iii. 18-21.)

That is the great trial of universal man which Christ brings in, an ethical trial which tests the man to his depths, which discovers what the man is as a creature, a subject of right, a personality made for God; and thus his choice is his self-judgment. Either love has won and despite all the past he is for God and covered by God's grace, or he is against God, discovered in His essential glory, self-condemned in the turpitude of his rebellion, with no unexhausted resource of Deity which might lead to a reversal of His judgment, committed to a voluntary choice of evil when the liberty of perfect good was within reach.

Who will say that there is not a unity in these two representations, that of the Synoptics and of John, or that the sublime transcendence of the latter over the former is not the further and complete illumination of the great method of Christ with men, so vividly pictured in particular instances by Matthew, Mark and Luke—a crowning illumination which could only have come from Him who inspired the whole.

But that is only the first passage in a great demonstration extending from Chapter iii. on to

Chapter xi. in which, through incidents and conversation, Jesus discovers Himself, on an equal plane of revelation but from many points of view, as an object of faith, drawing out men's souls to God revealed in Him. The world-vastness of the issues He raises, and the final character of the decisions are never left out of view. In the fourth chapter, He antiquates the ceremonial and provisional in religion striking into the centre of a soul's real need, discovering God as spiritual, demanding a spiritual worship, and then presenting Himself as Messiah the anointed of God. Here is a new aspect of this great worldwide movement, a coming forth from all shadows to the essential reality of things, the fundamental relations between God and man; and Christ reveals Himself the divine messenger to accomplish that real fellowship.

But with every step the self-consciousness of Jesus discovered in His words grows. The era of the provisional and ceremonial, the time preceding this great judgment of opportunity, was marked by impotence, a wholesale inability to discharge the functions, and realise the ends of life. In the healing of the impotent man we have a typical illustration of the power of retrieval which was in Christ. Jesus takes occasion of a heated wrangle about the miracle being wrought on the Sabbath, to discover the plane on which His power was operative. He places His working in the sphere of redemption, with the Father's working in nature. But more, being on a level with the Father's works, it was done in submission to the Father, being the endeavour of the Son to glorify the Father, and fulfil His design. And so the Father puts his honour on the Son, takes Him into the fulness of His counsel, trusts Himself and His purpose to the discretion and action of the Son. And then the resources of Deity are with Him, and the deliverance of man extends not only to physical weakness but to spiritual bondage. "He that heareth my words and believeth on Him that sent me hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life." (John v. 24.)

How at every step the issues are broadening and heightening and deepening. Christ is not only the fellow and equal of God bringing in this crisis of opportunity, able to deliver all who trust in Him from impotence, He himself is the food of the soul apart from which they have no life in them, choosing whom they have eternal life. (John vi.) As He mounts in the magnificence of His self-assertion and in His appeal to faith, doubts and questionings arise. The Spirit of controversy burns fiercer. Our own interest may indeed flag in the sustained and painful conflict. Our Lord, however, is presenting Himself as an object to faith. Even if He be met not merely by unreceptive spirits but by perverse and unscrupulous opposition, He will set forth His claims to be a world Saviour, in whom all mankind might find satisfaction and rest.

After having weighed the great self-arrogations just past, the reader is caught up into the rhythm of an ever expanding theme. In this crisis of opportunity which Christ has opened for all men, not only is He the Messiah bringing them into spiritual fellowship with God, the Healer of all impotence, the Bread of Life. He is the Fountain of refreshment, the Spring of a perennial and boundless energy. "If any man thirst let him come unto Me and drink. He that believeth on Me —out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." (John vii. 37, 38.) Again, He is the light of the world, "he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life." (John viii. 12.) He brings in the clue to existence, the moral and spiritual solution to the whole mystery of the present. Still further as regards the sheepfold, the body of His own whom God has called out of the world—first the theocratic nation, and then the New Testament Kingdom of the Redeemed, Christ is at once the door, and the Shepherd who safeguards every interest of the sheep with His own life. (John x. 1, 9, 15.) And then crowning with completeness His self-revelation as a Saviour, Jesus said to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life: He that believeth on me, though He was dead yet shall He live, and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die. (John xi. 25, 26.)

Only those who are standing wholly outside the scheme of Christian thought as interpreted by Christian life, could for a moment regard this as imagination—theosophic dreams—the symbolic language of a speculative philosophy. With all their overwhelming vastness of import, these are claims made by Christ on the faith and submission of His followers, made as directly as the claims simpler in form made by the other evangelists, and really one with them in spirit and aim. As such they have been regarded by the living Church of Christ in all ages, who have felt the unity of the whole presentation, and have yielded to Christ's vastest claims as to the simpler, the faith of their hearts, the devotion and self-sacrifice of their lives.

CHRIST DEALING WITH INDIVIDUAL INQUIRERS

VIII

CHRIST DEALING WITH INDIVIDUAL INQUIRERS

There is a saying reported of Dr Chalmers to this effect. Most men are prone to exaggerate their talent and depreciate their influence. This saying is of importance in relation to that particular branch of our subject to which we have now come. All the courses of our preparation for our ministry lead us (and not unduly as respects one side of our work) to attach supreme importance to intellectual endowment, and to a full equipment of knowledge at command of a trained intelligence. Indeed the view we have given of the continuity of the Christian Church—that we are standing in the stream of a continuous development gathering up into our testimony of to-day the fruitage and findings of all the past, points to an even more thorough discipline and complete equipment than has as yet been provided.

But there is another side. If ministers should be wise with the garnered experience of the ages, they are first and chief to be consecrated and forceful personalities in living contact with this actual time, recipients of present grace for present needs, in sympathy with their fellows, conversant with their thoughts, problems, difficulties, understanding them, and capable of turning all to the illumination of their master-relation to God, and to the enforcement of the immediate duty of reconciliation with Him. We are on the fighting edge of the Kingdom, and if the Church is not to go back she must advance through our testimony and influence.

And so we need men—not only of intelligence, of adequate knowledge, of disciplined faculty in a theological direction. We need strong personalities conversant with their fellows, full of initiative, magnetic because consumed with a great ideal, sagacious because instinct with divine guiding, bright and winning, to whom human souls will naturally draw as helpers and friends. We are defectively equipped for our particular task, unless our preparations of knowledge and intellectual attainment are crowned with these more masterful qualities, making for practical success. To take an analogous instance, in preparation for public life a man may have made the most elaborate study of civic, national, and international politics. But what is the use of them, if he cannot apply these studies to frame a national policy on some particular point, or drive home upon the popular heart the principles of that policy, or at least win an election and increase the party strength. The world, wise in their generation, count him a gilded failure. And whether, at this student stage, we are fully impressed with the fact or not—whatever side-ideals may be shining with seducing lustre to divert our sympathies and endeavours—by the standard of practical and useful achievement for the Church of God we shall be judged.

From the view which we have taken of our ministry as discovered in the example and teaching of our Lord, this fact comes out with solitary prominence that it is a dealing with individuals—the personal impress of His character and message on individual minds and hearts. Even in public discourse His ministry largely assumed that character, but over and above that, personal dealing with individuals occupied to quite an extraordinary extent His time and energies. Now with many preachers this is not very palatable teaching. We naturally prefer the wide-sweeping influence of popular impression, the large successes of intellectual demonstration. But, in yielding to this preference we are leaving out what has been a distinct method of spiritual aggression, an accompaniment of all seasons of spiritual progress from the times of Christ to the present hour.

Sometimes it is of supreme importance to get away from under the shadows of our own past. We are all the children of the Reformation. We belong to the last stages of an era devoted to the elaboration of doctrine and the sharp accentuation of its manifold aspects. Beyond question all this had to be done, and has been valuable for the enrichment of the Christian consciousness and the clear and articulate conception of the Christian verity. And this has given mould and stamp to one form of ministry, and to what until recently were the chief lines of our activity.

But that was only a special task committed to a particular age, and not the fundamental commission of Christendom. And so while the form or type of all our normal Church institutions belongs to that Protestant past, a new spirit has for long been flowing into these old bottles, widening them. This blending of old and new in differing ratios is characteristic of all Protestant Christendom. And in this attitude we are confronted by the dying down of old reverences, the relaxation of religious restraints, the rapid growth of militant secular ideals, and the supreme necessity of a new concerted endeavour to recover the modern world for Christ.

Herein, if the reader will permit the remark, lies the importance of such a course as the present. We are being drawn out of the moorings of the past to join action in a new conflict of Christ with the world-spirit, and so we come back from all subordinate standpoints, to sit at the feet of Christ Himself, to learn from his own lips the fundamental aim of the Kingdom, and the type of service by which it should be achieved. And at this point we are considering one aspect of this service, His dealing with individuals.

Note then the whole habit of life which fitted Christ to come in a peculiar degree into living contact with men. Here of course we are studying an ideal to which we may be enabled only progressively to conform. Our modern manner of life, and indeed the constitution of modern society, remove us to an immense distance from the kind of life which Christ lived among men. Still the great thing is to have the ideal before us. Let us with all honesty of soul seek in divine strength to conform in spirit to that, and God will open our way.

First of all let us note His accessibility. By living on the lowest level He stood open to all. There was no one who did not feel free to come to Him, while His inherent nobility made Him the equal of all. We have been taught in an opposite school, namely that influence comes from position, rank, wealth. And it is undeniable that to a large extent that is the case, with the propertied and money-making classes of the community. But on the other hand it is true and growing truer every day, as the great masses rise into power, that position limits, rank sequesters, and even wealth isolates from the toiling millions of mankind. If Christianity would strike into, and find its stronghold among the great masses, not only of civilised countries but of the world, it is another kind of influence—the sheer elemental force of personality winning supremacy in the lack and even scorn of material advantages, that will speak to and win the common heart of the race. There is just one man in Europe to-day that has won the confidence and devotion of the common people of an Empire, Father John of Cronstadt. The people crowd him in the street, whenever he appears. Once I spent a day waiting for my steamer in the harbour of that town, and he was on the lips of every sailor to whom I spoke as I fear no living man you could name is on the lips of our toilers. He has entered into the secret of Christ's holy poverty, and the money which he receives passes into the hands of all the sons of want. He is no demagogue, but a solitary, a mystic, who lives with God, and whose whole being has been fertilised by that communion. If we do not in our inmost hearts value such a hold on the masses of men to lead them unto God, and such confidence on their part in our being the voice of God to them, above all personal rank or position or fame, if we would not give up all, to win the dumb heart of common men to receive the grace of God at our lips, we are not worthy to be ministers to Christ.

Then joined with His accessibility, and indeed forming a large element in it, was His sympathy. He did not theorise, or argue, or merely prophesy about millenniums to come, but translated His vision of the Father, and of His willingness to receive them into eternal life, into a ministry of present help and succour. He made them feel that God cared for them, that the arm of omnipotence was not too much to stretch out on their behalf, that the evils of life were not irremovable but could flee at the voice of holy love, that force and wrong and all the disintegrations of an evil condition of things were not paramount, that something else was paramount which the feeblest faith could draw down. He convinced them that there was a spiritual universe, and a supreme Father to whom every human soul stood related, above and despite the forces and accidents of the world, and time. He did not carry these into their minds by reasoning, but into the core of their lives by the transfiguring joy of deliverance. He made the heart of Israel rebound with the wonder of love and joy and power, come to them from the unseen. They could not contain themselves. They ran from place to place. They sent the fiery cross, not of war but of peace, round wide regions.

How we are to translate into irresistible fact, the wonder of a supreme love, and bring it right into the heart of the common life of man to stir a like wonder and joy, we may not at present see. But if we are His willing instruments God will show. In the wide field of missions, through hundreds of medical missionaries a somewhat similar influence has been produced, of a depth and intensity which our obtuse western self-sufficiency is slow to perceive. Once at Banias near the Springs of Jordan, I was startled into a very strange assertion, by the look which I saw in the faces of some sufferers crowding round a medical missionary. They had neither eye nor interest for the strangers suddenly imported into their midst; and there was something in their glances and whole expression, which showed in remarkable combination physical joy and spiritual awe. "Look," I said to a friend, "that is the very gaze which greeted Christ as He went up and down this land." But this of healing is not the only avenue along which Divine love may incarnate itself in deeds. It may take wholly different directions from any which we have ever conceived. He who has the key of the human soul is with us if we are with Him.

Then everything was in keeping with the intense objective spirit of help. He did not keep them to babes' food. As they were able to bear

He led them into the heights and depths of the divine counsel, leaving them awe-struck and amazed. Yet how bright and objective His teaching, how full of open air, and the sights and sounds and processes of nature. How their daily life lived before them in His speech. I know this is a common place of the pulpit, but even yet we are not adequately impressed with the extent to which in the speech of Christ

> Earth by heaven and heaven by changeful earth
> (Were) illustrated and mutually endeared.

In one of the finest essays of the late Dean Church he so collects and groups the poetic figures of Dante that we realise how the life of his Italy blooms in that immortal poem. Let us take one discourse, the Sermon on the Mount, and note how that profound utterance is iridescent with the colours and forms, the stir and movement of this mighty universe of eye and ear. The types in the beatitudes were close to the surroundings of every hearer. He knew every one of them and could cap them with actual names. When Jesus spoke of savourless salt they had seen it thrown out in the highway. The city set on an hill—that was Safed gleaming in the light of the setting sun. And to summarise, in the recast of the old law, how, even to us and how much more to them, are the salient features of their daily experience etched into life, the jots and tittles of the prosing synagogue reader, the judgment and the council where petty and graver offences were tried, the Jew going to offer his gift arrested by his angry creditor, hurried to the judge, delivered to the jailer, locked in prison; the heated adjurations of the market place with samples of the favourite oaths, their sharp practices, their liberal curses. The whole passage, whatever more it may be, is a fragment pulsing with life. This man knows what he is talking about, for He has painted their life to the quick.

And when we come to Chapter vi. it is like turning to another page of contemporary Jerusalem, ay, and in less degree of many other towns—the synagogue leaders proud and stiff, dropping their ostentatious benevolence to win place and favour, monopolising the synagogue service, standing by the street corners to awe the simple folk with their prolonged devotion, going about all disfigured and miserable to heighten the impression of their fasts; yet proud, greedy, implacable. Can you not catch the atmosphere of the little place? And yet beneath all the varnish of religion, money is the God, and copying his betters, this man hides it in his coffers or digs a hole in the floor or the wall; the thief is plying his trade, and all sorts of evasiveness are being played off by one man against another,—the people serving God and mammon, the life consisting in the means of living, and the rank and respect of each depending on the raiment which marks his position.

Yet round about those seething, close-fisted, sanctimonious, envious little boroughs, which you can see in Christ's description, stretched the beautiful earth and the simple life of natural things. And it was with infinite art that to teach the contrasted lesson of the inherent dignity of life and simple trust in God, He should bring in what must have seemed so lovely in that amplitude of eastern light, the birds of the air, the fixed conditions of natural life, which make so foolish the wrangling and strife of man, and the flower-gemmed pastures with the lilies in regal bloom. Chapter vii. of this great discourse is equally picturesque. It is full of outer life, motes and beams which trouble eastern eyes, prowling dogs, unlawful swine, scorpions, bridle paths, thistles and thorns compared with fruit trees—vines and figs—cultivated with such care, closing with the great scene of the houses on the rock and the sand.

In form as in substance how close Christ got to the common heart, yet He was at an infinite remove from the arts of the demagogue, who for his private ends plays on the weakness and credulity of simple folk. While He so toiled for them He held himself aloof as a star in the quiet of His communion with God. He spent long nights in prayer. He went from their clamouring multitudes when because of physical excitement higher ends were no longer to be served. He pierced them with rebuke bringing out their trivial motives. He remained in His simple poverty incorruptible, and continually evaded every effort to make Him King.

This is an ideal ineffably far above what any of us can attain. Yet in its rebuking and humbling splendour let the great example shine on our view. And we shall be delivered from the errors which are making strong personalities mere negative quantities, and learn something of Christ's power to touch, and win, and by God's grace transfigure men.

Further note the effect of this in our Lord's actual intercourse with the poor. Every wounded and broken soul flocked to Him, the possessed, the epileptic, sufferers of all kinds and in all degrees. This was His crown. He woke faith in an infinite good among the crushed and broken of mankind. There is our failure, that we are not thrilling all the haunts of misery with the same consciousness. We are too staid and respectable, standing aloof from them; or, like all weak creatures, they learn cunning and play upon our softness to their own degradation. We do not as did our Lord breathe such an overcoming sense of goodness and God, that lifted above their baseness, they come crying, for help it is true, but for a glimpse of the Father's face and for a life in which all true help lies.

But besides these, what a power He had over all sorts and conditions of men, strong-handed toilers like Peter and John, members of the Sanhedrin like Nicodemus, despised publicans like Matthew and Zacchaeus, women of high position and poor outcasts, old Pharisees like Simon, and the rich young ruler, shrewd lawyers like him who was not far from the kingdom, the centurion, the courtier of Herod, the half-heathen Syro-Phenician and rulers of the Synagogue from the inmost shrine of Jewish orthodoxy, the malefactor on the cross and Pilate in his Praetorium.

Now in a sense this is being accomplished today by the widely diffused influence of believing members. Perhaps there is no one, among all who are indifferent or opposed to Christianity in Britain, who has not been in contact with some living soul. But surely it is a question for us why has our religion so largely lost its magnetic and expansive quality? Why is it not as natural for us to go out on a campaign of witness, as for those Celtic missionaries who evangelised large regions of Europe, or for Columba and Aidan who spoke to prince and peasant in the name of the Lord, or for the Lollards or for Francis and his followers, or for Wesley and his preachers, or for even our reserved evangelical fathers, through all the dark moderate days.

This is the central abiding work of the Church, and when she has lost that certitude of faith, and joy of experience which makes such personal witnessing inevitable as breathing, bold and uncompromising in the intensity of the longing for the good of men, irresistible through the indwelling spirit, knowing no distinctions of class and kind in its endeavour, she is already on the downward path. Of course I do not refer to the mechanical buttonholing of men and pushing one personal question, but such a buoyancy of the redeemed consciousness, such a sense of having won the clue to life and the soul's supreme good, as makes the man electric, unable to withhold his testimony or conceal his joy. That is worth infinitely more than the finest demonstration or most persuasive discourse. When a man is waking up to the possession of immortal life, and is trembling to make the venture of faith, he wants facts to go on, and what you have found is of far more value to him than what you think.

Now in this we are running counter to maxims and opinions which found much favour a generation or more since. A great deal was said about unconscious influence—certainly an important fact. But it came to this, that without any overt confession, men were really to confess Christ by letting their characters tell. With the positive element in that I entirely agree. An upright master speaks by his deeds, a self-sacrificing public man by his entire career. But where that is dissociated from a distinct confession of Christ, men may make these out to be a proof rather of the inherent goodness of human nature, and be content with things as they are. The secret of the middle-class withdrawal from Church lies in the diffused sense, that they have a sufficient stock of moral ideals and attained standards, and that they can get on without her ministries.

And here we touch the central defect of that whole habit of feeling and opinion. It was untrue to what was and is distinctive of the Christian faith. Christ did not come simply to produce elevated ethical characters, but to achieve something, which including that, carried us a great deal further. He came to found the Kingdom of God, to introduce men into the immediate fellowship of the Father, to begin a life in us from a divine centre through the inabiding of the Spirit, so that here and now energies might spring and a character be formed, not merely coming up to human standards, but fitting one for the fellowship of God, and moving on to the perfection of heaven. Now a confession of that—which is the only characteristic Christian confession, must be accompanied by a statement of the fact that this came to us from beyond, and has become ours by the mediation of Christ through His propitiation, and life in His Spirit.

We must teach to our people the need of this fuller confession if we are to achieve real and durable results. And we ourselves must place this dealing with individuals as to their acceptance with God, in the fore-front of our own ministry. Many more than we dream of are hungering for light, and eager to be led into liberty. And if we would approve ourselves faithful ministers of Christ, we must welcome the confidence of our people, and seek preparation of heart and mind that we may be quick to use every opportunity.

And now in what remains of this lecture let us show the remarkable skill of our Lord in carrying out this work.

I. Note the naturalness of His introductions. He is seeking to recover lives for God, to lift them into the liberty of God, and so He approaches them not only with an innate courtesy, but with a reverence for the image of God in them. He touches what is best in them, believing that they are eminently worth the winning. There is no finer instance than that of the woman of Samaria. The way to deal with all outcasts, is to touch the fountain of their self-respect. Show for them the reverence which they should feel for their God-given nature. He asks a favour from her. He, a Jew, speaks kindly to her, a Samaritan and an acknowledged sinner. She cannot conceal her unbounded surprise. Christ feels the upleap of heart in the pleased wonder of her deeper self, and meets it with words of intense yearning and marvellous self-revelation. "If thou knewest the gift of God." It is impossible to unfold all the strands of meaning in those great words, each having its own appeal to her being. The consciousness of her ignorance and want, the suggested greatness of something which He has to give, of a wonder about the giver, of a boon from the unseen which would be infinitely refreshing, and which His every word betokened He was so willing to bestow, were all such as to transfix her with wonder and disarm her of her natural reserve and suspicion.

And Christ could with equal power handle men. Take that case of Matthew the publican, a genuine kind of man in a hated calling, and naturally keen to scent reproach, or even patronage, and to stand on the defensive. Note how Christ deals with him. He does not "dear brother" him, or stoop to him, or make excuse for, much less rebuke him. He looks past his circumstances to the elemental manhood that was in him, and soul greeting soul across all these barriers, He simply said, "Matthew, I have a use for you, come." And Matthew rose, crowned with the crown of that choice which blotted out the past, and in one moment was knit to Christ for ever.

But there is a sequel to this story just as significant. There are some sound-hearted men who can do nothing shabby. Matthew had broken with his calling but he could not turn his back on his old friends without saying, "Good-bye." And so he made a great feast. Let the reader ask himself, if he would have gone to that feast? The company would not have been very savoury—"a great company of publicans" Luke says—shrewd-eyed, hard-fisted, with tempers like modern Jewish usurers, and with a flavour of extortion about them. Most of us would have said, "you should cut this connection at once." No! granted they were publicans, they had been friends. A man is not absolved from being a gentleman by becoming a Christian. He would go out in the open before them. He would honour them as old friends, in the act of telling them why he went. And he wanted his friends to know his Lord, that they might feel the attraction which he had experienced. I seem to know Matthew through that act, and respect him with all my heart. And understanding his servant's motive, Christ went to that feast with a glad heart. There is a phrase of deep significance used by Christ in connection with it, which reveals what He felt. "Go ye and learn what this meaneth, I will have mercy and not sacrifice." This was an inspiration of Matthew's, his holy thank-offering to God.

Another case was that of Zacchaeus—a rich publican with twinges of conscience, who had been trying to restore the moral balance by restitution, and who, still uneasy and dissatisfied, had crept into the sycamore secretly to behold Him. The danger of that man was that finding his sacrifices gave him no peace, he might slip back into his old ways. With a subtle insight which goes far beyond human discernment, Christ calls him forth before the eyes of all, counts on his responding, proposes to be his guest, recognises the struggle, notes the need of instant decision, draws him out of himself, hears of his past endeavours, hears in them the breathing of a heart which would fain be at rest with God, and commands the faith of his whole being by telling him that salvation is come to his house and that God is at peace with him.

Ay, we have to put ourselves in the place of men, think with them, feel for them, interpret them to themselves, command their assent, yea, sometimes encourage their feeble faith by declaring the forgiveness of God. The Church of Rome errs by making mechanical and a requirement, what is of great value when souls are driven by exigency to seek our counsel. Christ does give his faithful servants great power with troubled hearts, clothing for these seekers their poor words with authority. Many a minister has been brought into circumstances where these words bloomed with new meaning "Whosoever's sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them, whosoever sins ye retain, they are retained." (John xx. 23.)

II. But notice they sought him out more than He sought them. We contrive all sorts of outside attractions, to bring men to the spiritual. In Him the spiritual drew, in the absence of all other attractions. He distinctly refused to work miracles as a vulgar wonder. They were outflashings of power to serve spiritual ends, to awaken faith, and draw men to God. What thrilled His hearers was the sense of measureless power in and accompanying His message. We have seen in our own day the same irresistible attractiveness without a vestige of miracle. Man lies open to God as the face of nature to the sun of heaven. And if God begins to work manifestly with elect servants, through all incrustations of worldliness, the abysmal hunger of man's spirit for God will leap up. And then all other interests will seem nothing to the spiritual interest, and nothing will be able to keep back the cry of man after God.

III. He was so one with His mission—swallowed up in it—that all He was and all that happened to Him helped it on. His life was an evangel. His moveless calm and sweet serenity, his momentary wrath at the polluters of God's house, His passion against wrong, His sympathy with the friendless and poor, His reserve, His distinct striking out of His own line despite taunts of wine bibber, or reproaches of irreligion and blasphemy, made Him magnetic to every seeking soul. The added lustre of holy intent which brightened under every attack; at times a calm intensity, a flame-like devotion burning through his frame, so that his friends would fain hold Him as one beside Himself, a sense of things unseen which gave sin an awful enormity, compelled the conviction that here was a man apart living for one supreme end. He seemed to trample on natural claims upon his disciples, so bent was He on one ministry. He thrust His own homelessness before His auditors so that if they came, it would be as men prepared for separation and self denial. The gathering wrath of the Jewish leaders, the shadow of a malign destiny which hung over His head, the growing sublimity of word and life under the shadow of eclipse,—all gave momentum to His message, power for conviction to His word, whether hearers rejected it to their final apostacy or followed it to faith.

And if we are to be followers of Christ we must be personally identified with our mission, our whole life bound up with it, taking the risks, the reproach, the losses of a fearless witness, having no other end but in self-obliteration to glorify our

Lord. At no less cost than that can the kingdom of God be built up. Mere professionalism is powerless and an offence. The world will only listen to a man transfigured by his own faith.

IV. But now let me show the profound and varied interest attaching to this work, from actual instances in the life of our Lord and (1) to begin with note how he deals with Nicodemus. The great interest of this case is that this man is from the heart of that Jewish world, from the inmost shrine of that ruling party which rejected Him. He is a man of his age, limited by the average standard of belief, and the general intellectual view of his time. There is one difference, while incapable of rising above his environment, he was honest and kept his soul open to light. Such men are always in a small minority. The number who are closed to evidence, against their party interest or the opinion of their school, is always large. He is no idealist or wild theorist, but sober and matter of fact. The teaching impressed him, but it was the divine wonders accompanying the teaching, which to him gave it constraining authority. He was simply yielding to evidence. He had not so much developed affinity with Christ's message, but bowed to Him as an evident messenger of God.

Christ accepts what a man is prepared to concede. He uses the authority which he allows.

Reason had brought Nicodemus thus far, but reasoning could not complete his cure. Neither to the Jew nor to the Christian was religion something which man could work out from reason; but a counsel of God communicated to men. And Christ gave Him that counsel in its most uncompromising form. "Except a man be born again he cannot see the Kingdom of God." (John iii. 3.) The man is reduced to sheer stupor. He gropes about among the most foolish suppositions unable to find a clue. But Jesus only reaffirms his statement in a more extended form.

Was that kind or fair to this worthy seeker? Do not let us be led away by appearances. A Christian teacher does not go far in wrestling with the worser part of a man, to set free buried and overborne capacities for God, before he awakes to the necessity of striking his hardest at the fetters which bind him. What withholds any of us from God, is not a pardonable ignorance or blindness, but sin, the self-will of the intrusive ego thrusting in its own mind instead of God's mind. It was his pharisaic self-sufficiency which had hid the truth from him, of which his own scriptures were full—the impotence of man and the need of a creative power from God. The psalmist had cried, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me." Jeremiah and Ezekiel had both declared that God was about to set up a new covenant with his people—a covenant of grace in which he would give a new heart, a right spirit, take away the stony heart and uphold them in their new life by His free spirit. "Art thou a master of Israel and knowest not these things?"

Do you not see the masterliness of this method? The master of the law is thrown back on the law. The teacher of Israel has a new light thrown upon his own teaching, Christ's message is identified with the accepted faith of his whole life. And then when the man lies open to a harmony of light from past and present which he cannot reject, Christ asserts his authority as He who has descended out of heaven to tell of heavenly things—the great mercy of God by which all this was to be fulfilled.

If we study that as a method of dealing with a man in Nicodemus's position, we will be struck with its power. But what of the success? I admit Nicodemus did not come right out, as the phrase goes. That is one of the characteristic elements in the case. We must learn to value quiet victories like these. Some men never act on impulse. They must relate their new discoveries to the thinkings of their lives. It was not heroic of Nicodemus to maintain a constrained silence in the Sanhedrin. He stood up against injustice, however, even there, and drew down upon himself feared reproach. And when all the disciples had fled, Joseph and he gave the silent witness of respect for His body. May God help us to be faithful for His counsel with strong men, as Christ was, to throw them back upon the light that is in them, shutting them up to God and His Christ. There is a magnificent work for God to be done in this very line by those who have the courage and devotion.

(2) Take another case with remarkable bearings on the present, that of the Rich Young Ruler. It is most wonderful how certain moral types are reproduced amid manifold diversities in widely sundered ages. We shall have to deal with just such lives before we have travelled far, and if we prophesy smooth things to them, we shall be guilty of their blood. Even in spiritual matters we must take account of the physical basis of life. Some men are born well-conditioned, others very ill-conditioned for a noble life. To some naturally, life is a conflict of fierce opposites. In others life flows smoothly along, easily influenced to what is higher, with aptitudes for the finer aspects of conduct in study and amusement, that under good management throw the bias of the being in noble directions. Such was this man. He enjoyed every advantage, and life was made interesting, with studies and occupations which cultivated instead of degrading. Brought up

from infancy in the school of strict duty, custom and kindly authority scarcely allowed him to feel the strain. Religion to him turned its fairest face in the lives of those whom he loved. His life was not only blameless, but bursting with pure sympathies and emotions. Christ loved this cultured flower of humanity. In most men, half of these outward signs would be proof of their oneness with God. But in him they were only the fruits of training, which precede full and final decision. Money and position were appealing to him. And there was a secret hunger for something higher, which in his openness of mind he felt had not been attained.

This was what led him to Christ. Jesus saw the balance of his life, trembling between opposites. He saw that he was not very deeply concerned, existence being so rich and full for him. Yet he cannot deny the hunger which rises up from time to time. In this mood he comes to our Lord. There is just the slightest touch—not of patronage—but of deference from above to this travelling preacher. In His selfless love, Christ catches it not to resent but to fear. Is the good really opened to this soul, that sense of good and thirst for oneness with the good, which reduces all else to nothing? With eyes upon him, Christ says "Why callest thou me good? There is only one good, namely God. Hast thou seen the glory of God in me?" There is no recognition of the point in these questions, no sense of the One who when He comes, comes to claim the whole life. Jesus was so touched by His beauty that He wanted to meet Him on that high plane, wanted to hear him say "Yes Lord, he is the alone good. I long for Him but thou hast revealed Him to me."

He has found out where the man is not, now He begins where he is. Eternal life, dost thou say? Thou knowest the commandments—these are steps to that good. And then he repeats them, confining Himself to the duties of man to man. The very lowness of the ground seemed to justify the youth in asserting his merit. "All these have I kept from my youth up." In a sense it was perfectly true, and yet his saying it at this juncture showed he was a Pharisee, leaning on his merits and aspiring to greater. Still that was not all, there were openings to higher light which he had not fully grasped. But the world and his position were coming in between. He lacked the one crystallizing element, which would have given all the elements unity and fixity, supreme consecration to an ideal, the choice of the good as his portion, come of everything else what might.

With infinite insight Christ put the alternative, making the strongest appeal for His soul, yet blinking nothing. Wealth and position were influencing him far more than he knew. We have seen more than one such life go the same road. For lack of the supreme surrender, the most fine gold of their young promise became dim. "Sell all thou hast, give to the poor, go for the good, God, eternal life at all hazards." Out of that will come a new wealth which he cannot dream of now. And then the heart of Jesus let itself go, as hardly again in His public ministry. He felt the young man's attractions for himself. He knew that He had a strong hold on the young man's heart, that the new thoughts and better aspirations of his nature were associated with that attachment. "Come, follow me." He who had lived in scorn of material good besought him to strike for the highest, choose the sole good at cost of all. Christ welcomed him to His fellowship, where he would learn all. There is the issue, fully, finally, irrevocably raised. Would he follow the highest light at all costs, and accept Him whose words went ringing home to his deepest self, whatever that might bring. At bottom that is the crisis—the nature of the decision which saves, makes a man new, daring to follow the supreme good discovered in Christ, a something rising out of the deeps of us which settles everything. Of this the boldest decider knows that it is not of him, not his native product this uprising of the soul. While here is paradox, the man who fails to decide knows it is of himself. He took the worse when he might have had the best. "He went away sorrowful."

That is the issue which we have to raise, the point to which we have to draw men; and there are with us behind the veil, agencies and elements we cannot know, which as factors of experience are indisputable, but which when we put them into words and wrangle about them, are stumbling blocks and mysteries.

Still, however, we have only touched the fringe of a great theme. Those brief tracts called the Gospels are really immeasurable in their teaching and applications. When one patiently sinks into them to draw away their spiritual content, John's hyperbole of the world not being able to contain the books that might be written, rises before the mind with new pregnancy and force.

CHRIST MEETING QUESTIONERS AND OPPONENTS

IX

CHRIST MEETING QUESTIONERS AND OPPONENTS

In his book on the *Study of Religion*,[1] the late Dr James Martineau illustrates with beauty and power what he calls a fact of moral dynamics, viz.: "that unless acted on by a higher nature we never rise." "All the Dynamics of character are born of inequality and lie asleep amid unbroken equilibrium." And further as to the nature of this influence exerted by the higher nature on the lower he adds: "If you are intimately thrown with one, in whom you recognise a greater spirit than your own, to whose gentle or majestic excellence you go into captivity, his power over you takes no single line of direction but speaks through all the dimensions of your nature; it does not set you on copying him, but bends you low before the Holiest of all." Thinking over these statements we may come to see a glory in words spoken of and by Christ, and in outcomes of His ministry, that have been causes to many of misgiving and difficulty.

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[1] Dr Martineau's *Study of Religion*, pp. 30-33.

Whatever else Christ has done, He has most effectually and for ever broken up the moral stagnation of the world. The supreme ideal, He has stirred the dry bones of a corrupt race. As Simeon foretold, "thoughts out of many hearts have been revealed." In the light of an unrealised good, men have been thrown back on the pricks of conscious evil, and have been forced to the conviction that they must make a decision of some sort. The issue thus raised, has been the keenest, sharpest, deepest which ever has been or can be raised, not about anything which the man has or is, but about himself. And of course where man is free, all sorts of attitudes will be taken up, all degrees of hostility, all grades of conformity. And as each man's standpoint is that which he has chosen for himself with which to front time and eternity, he cannot but assert it. And more, his choice colours all he is, his aspiration, his views of the present, his action. So that he meets in antagonism, at many points, men who have chosen different ideals or standpoints. They cannot all win; some must conquer and others go to the wall. And so what Christ said is true, sadly true when we think of the resistances of adverse forces to the ideal, grandly true, when we think of the ceaseless struggle of souls at all cost up to the ideal, "I came to send fire upon the earth." (Luke xii. 49.)

But this great truth goes further. By breaking up the moral stagnation of the world, Christ has stepped up to the moral leadership of the world. For all other interests have subordinated themselves to this supreme issue as discovered by the Son of God. Empires thrive or fail as they approach or recede from His ideal. All other interests hang on the supreme interest of right as against self, and on right as interpreted and carried to an issue by Christ. And so all the controversies of time tend to converge on this conflict of moral issues, kept alive in the world by the magnetism of Christ. I came not to send peace but a sword. (Matt. x. 34.) With what a magnificent courage Christ fathers, and in a certain sense takes responsibility for all the consequences of this mission. So are men to be sorted out into their moral and spiritual levels, to the last grain.

The reader can hardly fail to be impressed by such an ethical world-view. That vast field, however, in its entirety, lies beyond us and our small endeavours. To control these vast world-issues to ends of His kingdom is part of the task for which Christ reigns as Mediator, and all power is given unto Him in heaven and earth. We cannot understand the scope and compass of his mission, as it moves on through the ages, without taking all that into account.

We narrow ourselves, however, to the example which He has given us in His earthly ministry. And even here we assume what we have already pointed out in contrasting the method of Jesus with that of John. He did not conduct a loud-resounding moral reform with exposure of the sores of that time. He went out after the lost until He found them. He searched for open souls and brought to them immediately the blessing of eternal life. In this sphere of the moral and spiritual, result is immeasurably more valuable than impression. Impression is nothing save as a means to self-decision. If maintained without resulting in decision, it becomes an anodyne, killing the nerve of true spiritual concern, kindling insincerity and spurious flowerings of devotion. But even self-decision is an inconclusive thing when compared with a man's becoming the subject of divine power. "He shall baptise you with the Holy Ghost and with fire." (Matt. iii. 2.) Jesus, speaking in fellowship with the Father and by the power of the Spirit, went for these positive results, the actual building unit by unit of the kingdom of God, sending out into the world these new created centres, in contact with Father and Son by the Spirit. In deep peace of soul among the quiet hills of Galilee He carried on that work.

Nor did Jesus carry on a propaganda against opinion. We feel in our day that the air is stifling to anyone who is seeking to produce spiritual conviction and lead on to a personal decision for Christ. But as we saw incidentally in the first lecture it was equally the case in the time of Christ. Every movement of thought seemed to divert attention from the point at which He aimed. Zealots plotted against foreign rule, a large courtier class idolised it; Sadducees rationalised, Pharisees were absorbed in ceremonial externalism. Their religious aspirations were diverted to political dreams. Christ however went behind the whole, neglected the whole save as it crossed His path. His mission was from God, and He would speak to what was God-given, and inherent in man, leaning on a power that was divine, looking for results that were divine. And as preachers of Christ we must in this follow Him.

While affirming this with the utmost conviction, I remember that the Church can only continue to stand on foundations of truth. And it is her concern by those specially gifted and called, to vindicate her confessional testimony at the bar of reason and human experience. But to bring that apologetic spirit into public preaching, especially into the aggressive work of the Church, is the profoundest mistake. To apologise is to establish our truth by reference to some more central and generally admitted truth. But there is none such. Duty and sin and renewal are facts of experience as truly as matter, and force, and laws of nature;

more important in themselves, and far more central to the human soul, as in their essence more generally recognised by men. And religion, received as it stands, is capable of a fuller vindication than any scientific truth. The spiritual has more powerful resources than any material ones, and leaning on God, we must make appeal to these. For fifty years or more in the middle period of last century, a strong apologetic strain crept into the preaching of Britain, but however much it comforted the faithful, it did not even powerfully arrest the outward drift, much less appreciably extend the kingdom of God.

Still, however, as we go forward from the standpoint of the spiritual, in the illumination of the Holy Spirit, to speak to that deepest part of man in which an imperishable witness of God lies, we shall meet those who are hindered from receiving our message by all sorts of difficulties, worthy and unworthy, or who will even shield themselves from the force of our appeal, by creating difficulties whose stress they do not deeply feel. The more aggressive we are, the more we enter into our divine commission and make bold to deal with all men for God, the more frequent will be the obstacles of this kind with which we shall have to contend. Now in a matter of this description rules are of little worth. Human personality is too Protean in its manifestations to admit of all its eddies and confusions being classified. We can only take some characteristic examples of Christ and so open them up that the principle underlying His actions is seen, in doing which I believe we shall get such glimpses of the great law governing his action, as shall be a guide to us more complete than any rules, and applicable to every instance of questioning and opposition.

If we claim to come into the centre of men's lives and deal with them about their relation to God and their entrance into His kingdom, they will challenge our authority. The strange thing is that whenever preachers take this line, the old calm is broken, the slumping of them up with other teachers of opinion is at an end. Men feel instinctively that there is authority behind the speakers' words. They do not dispute the authority, and by an implication they own an authority, but simply discredit this particular messenger of the authority. The unconscious discovery thus made of the openness of the human soul, beneath all self-sophistications, to a call of God, is very striking. And if you search the history of revivals you will find but a repetition of the same phenomena. "He hath a devil and is mad, why hear ye him?" (John x. 20.) The Pharisees said unto him "Thou bearest record of thyself, thy record is not true." (John viii. 13.) Even in pride of their dry-as-dust learning they condemned Him. "How knoweth this man letters having never learned?" (John viii. 15.)

What encouragement we should take from these words? Men cannot ignore this message. There is that within them which bears involuntary witness to its truth. But with this does there not come an awful sense of responsibility? If they can break the messengers they will. Every attempt on Christ to call Him Samaritan, devil, or to ascribe His power to Beelzebub, only recoiled on themselves, because thus they revealed their own animus and outraged the popular conscience, which felt the moral glory of Christ. But it may be quite otherwise with us. By our personal follies we may annihilate for many, the power of the message which we bring. If we are going to take up this work for God, personal holiness and self-discipline, and separation from evil, are of priceless value. The savour of the preacher's character has often continued the vitality of his message long after he has passed away.

To turn from this, however, what line did Christ take in opposition to such objections? He rung home on that aroused sense of authority which we have described. I want you to notice the exceeding boldness of Christ in dealing with men. He challenged the verdict of their religious sense "My doctrine is not mine but His that sent me." (John vii. 16.) Yea more wonderful than that, He puts the religious sense on the same level as the moral sense. You can only know the morally right by doing it. (v. 17.) And so with the spiritually true. To understand the spiritual, to distinguish true from false, you must yield to the light whencesoever it comes, begin to do what is verified to your soul as true. Now, says our Lord, if you are only willing to do God's will, you will be led into further light until you can see for yourself whether my message comes from God and reveals God, or is some poor imitation of my own. What he demands of men is to be true to the highest light within them. And he arrogates for His message a voice as universal, a validity as absolute for the religious nature, as right for the soul's sense of right. Even as by doing the right we prove the right, so let a man become even willing to do the will of God wherever seen, and in Christ's word he will come into the full light of God. Why, in My whole bearing you may gather that that is so. If my doctrine were of Myself, I would be seeking My own glory as teacher and prophet. But if I am swallowed up in seeking His glory that sent Me, what is the inference but that He indeed speaks in Me? (John vii. 14-19.)

These are immeasurably great words, and we have never yet entered into them. The church of Christ has never fully stood on them, otherwise her action would be much more commanding than it has proved itself to be. The gospel is as axiomatic to the religious consciousness as the moral law to the moral sense. Inherent light is in the one as in the other, to command the free assent of that sense for God, which like the moral sense is an inalienable endowment of man. What utter fools have we been with our apologetics, and philosophising, and even our dockings and trimmings of the faith, to make it palatable to man. And yet all the time, if we had only along Christ's line discovered God, there is that in man deeper and more imperious than any of the surface considerations which we have been invoking, which runs to the divine as iron filings to a magnet. The way in which Christ's teaching immediately appeals to men of all heathen nations, living wholly out of our worlds of thought, is a proof of immense import, new to these last generations. Reading the numerous narratives which exist of even cannibals and savages, no less than cultured Brahmins and Buddhists, rising to an intuitive reception of and submission to the mind of God revealed in Christ, we have seen new beauty in the immortal sentences of Plato, in which he pictures the soul of man wakening from the corruptions of earth to recognise the supernal beauty. "Every soul of man has in the way of nature beheld true being. Few only retain an adequate reverence. And they when they behold any image of that other world are rapt in amazement. The wings of the soul begin to swell and grow—and the growth extends under the whole soul, for once the whole was winged. Wherever she thinks she will behold the beautiful one, thither in her desire she runs. And when she has seen him and bathed herself with the waters of desire, her constraint is loosened and she is refreshed and has no more pangs and pains."[1] From the dim and uncertain standpoint of heathenism what a magnificent description is here given of that vast region of our being immediately responsive to the visitation of God, and rising as to its native air in surrender to the call of God.

II. Let us turn now to another line of questioning, the claim for intellectual certitude. We shall find the best example of this in another passage from John (chap. x. 22-30). Christ is in Jerusalem at the Feast of Dedication and has been walking in Solomon's porch, when certain Jews came round about Him and directly laid on him the blame of their indecision. How long dost thou make us to doubt or hold us in suspense? If thou be the Christ tell us plainly. Here they profess their willingness to believe, assert their impatience at the obstacles put in the way of belief, and expostulate with Christ for His backwardness in satisfying them. With great skill too they raise the fundamental issue, is He the Messiah or is He not? If they are satisfied He is the Messiah, of course they are bound to bow to Him, if not, whatever else He may be matters little. But further, another sign of great perception, they do not argue, much less object. From the categories of time you cannot prove or disprove what comes from beyond time. The burden of self-manifestation rests on Him. But He must vindicate to reason His entrance from a realm beyond rational experience. The manifestation must be so complete as to be indisputable. " If thou be the Christ tell us plainly."

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[1] Plato's *Phaedrus*, 250-252. Jowett's translation.

We may discern even from this brief unfolding, how far-reaching this question is, and that it brings before us the ever repeated question of the curious intellect—urged still in a great variety of forms, oftentimes in much less reasonable terms, and appearing to become ever more inevitable and inexorable, as science is discovering the visible world lying within the realm of law. And in the answer, we have the permanent attitude and all embracing reply of Christ and His religion to that claim. We might occupy large space in pointing out the frequent recurrence throughout the ages of this claim, the rising up of spurious satisfactions as in Gnosticism, to gratify this curiosity, and then show how the living Church has answered uniformly along the line marked out by our Lord in this passage.

In effect these men demand a full and clear—what we would call a scientific—proof to reason of the Messiahship, or more widely of the divine origin of the Christian religion, which would leave doubt as impossible as, *e.g.*, in the case of the propositions of Euclid or the Newtonian Theory. Tell us the matter of fact, art thou the Christ? Tell us this plainly on grounds capable of demonstration to every honest mind. At first sight no demand could appear more reasonable. And yet when you come to look at the matter nothing could be more unreasonable. If Jesus had come to discover an extension of the material order of the universe, of new kingdoms of natural being, that would have been the only course to take. But He came to make a revelation on a higher plane. There are a great many kinds of truth of which you cannot give a formal intellectual demonstration. You cannot give a formal intellectual demonstration of the aesthetic laws which govern artistic perfection. They have dawned on artistic natures in the practice of their arts, and they appeal immediately to the cultured artistic sense of others. Similarly moral truths are the findings, by action and experience, of what is in harmony with the moral sense—the regulative part of man, and what therefore secures individual and social harmony. Of course since all truth is one, aesthetic truth and moral laws have correspondence with the intellect, which classifies the materials given from that higher level. But it was by following the laws characteristic of their own fields, that they have established themselves as departments of real knowledge, having these correspondences with other fields.

Christ however came on a plane of His own as we have seen right through, to speak to that which was deepest and most pervasive in man. He came to reveal the supreme Spirit, as life, and lord, and portion, to human spirits—more plainly and nakedly, a divine Will to human wills, that they might enter into His larger life and be lifted up into liberty. Now in the very nature of things this kind of revelation must be in the sphere of the spiritual—God so discovering Himself in His Son that the spiritual rises up in response within the breast of man: the Son casting so full-orbed a reflection of the Deity, in perfect association with Him, that His being Messiah, the anointed of God, stands self-witnessed, to every awakened soul. Such was the plane, such was the form of the revelation which Christ came to impart. None other was possible in the very nature of things, for you can only discover spiritual qualities to a spiritual nature drawn into certain sympathy therewith. No other revelation could serve his spiritual end, to bring men to God.

To step outside this His distinctive sphere and to attempt something different, the establishment of a historic fact by a historic demonstration, to have put in historic claims to Messiahship, after the fashion of a claimant proving His title to a throne, would not have advanced but have complicated His spiritual mission. If He had been successful on that material level, He would simply have gathered round Himself all the dreamers and zealots who longed for material triumph, through a warlike Messiah, over all their foes, and so defeated His divine intents. If there remained room for debate, however sufficient the demonstration, instead of kindling a religious revival, He would have started a wordy war of texts and their interpretations. I ask you then to admire the wisdom of Christ, the originality and sufficiency of the line which He pursued, freeing Him from all incidental controversies, carrying Him at once into the heart of His spiritual mission, to win not intellectual assent to facts which might have no value for the life, but the response of the human spirit to the divine, and through this the entrance as life and power of the divine to the human. But beyond and above this, I ask you to note that for the intellectual demonstration of facts—outward historic facts—this was the best way. When through His spiritual revelation He had built up His Kingdom, men could for themselves compare the outcome in Christ with the preparation for His coming in early ages, and satisfy themselves of the reality of that in which they had put their trust. By the manifest congruity of a divine purpose reaching through the ages and culminating in Christ, by forecasts in types and institutions and prophecies manifestly beyond all vaticination of man, by the extraordinary and undreamt of fulfilment in Christ beyond possibility of manufacture, and by the character and formation of the documents themselves which communicate His character and message, we have a combination of witness to the reality, character, and claims of Christ without a parallel in the world.

After this general explication of Christ's standpoint derived from a wide induction of His teachings, we can see the meaning of His reply in every part and in its relations. What the Jews said was quite true. Christ had not set out to give a complete demonstration on strict historical grounds of the historical fact of His Messiahship. And yet Christ could say, "I told you and ye believed not." What I worked for was not to give you intellectual certainty of facts outside you, but certitude within you. I appealed to faith. I spoke to the spiritual sense lying dormant within you. I wanted from you not merely an assent but an act, trust of the heart, submission of the life. And so I did not prove, I revealed. All I have done has been a telling you, the discovery of Myself, the unveiling of My continual oneness with the Father. My utterance of each word, out from the centre of the Father's holy will, in the one effort to glorify the Father, the circuit of My teaching, the end of My endeavour, all with one voice revealed to your spiritual being this fact, that God, in the sent one of His own choosing, was knocking at the door of your heart. What was that but witness, the only witness worth having, that Messiah has indeed come to summon you to direct relation with God, to new life in Himself.

Now let me show My ground of a righteous quarrel with you. You have been putting the blame of your indecision on Me, but it lies on yourselves. If you had yielded to that witness borne to your inmost soul, if you had come out and taken God at His word, then in transfigured selves you would have had the proof of that witness. But you shirked the issue, you stifled that inner testimony, you did violence to the convictions of your inmost souls. In other words you showed your bias against God. Of course you are uneasy, and so now you want to put the blame of your indecision upon Me, by asking Me to meet you on a plane of your choosing. You want Me to make a demonstration which will not commit you, to satisfy your curiosity without bowing your will. But I am here so to commit you by bringing God and you together in your spirit's deeps, that you must decide to have Him or not to have Him, and so judge yourselves.

Not only did I tell you in this inner way, but My witness to your inmost being was accompanied by such signs of God's working with and in Me, that no faculty of your being could resist the impression on your spirits. And if you do not meet Me on that level, I will never meet you on any other. What does your rejection of that witness point to, but that you have no desire to get into contact with the Father, have no affinity with Him, are not of My sheep. Where there is such incongruity how can there be understanding?

See how knowledge in the spiritual sphere comes, through moral and spiritual congruity. "My sheep hear My voice." From this comes union, from this eternal life in Me, from this fellowship with the Father, through the indwelling of the Father's life and power. And so they find out not merely My Messiahship, but my oneness with the Father. My dear fellow-students, the Church in all ages has so far seen this truth, received it in part, but far more often gone away from and contradicted it in practice. The time is come when she should step out on the line of Christ, counting on the witness of God in every man, and the resources of divine grace. When the Church in a mighty faith throws herself on these divine supports, we shall see such a work of God among all peoples, on all intellectual and social levels, as the world has never known.

3. We shall now consider a case of a very different type, such as we might be tempted to dismiss with a rebuke, or utterly disregard. I refer to that story told in the three synoptic gospels, of the woman with the seven husbands. (Matt. xxii. 23; Mark xii. 18; Luke xx. 27.) Whether this be a true story, or a crafty concoction devised to serve as a trap, it is the cunning device of light-hearted doubters who have come to be so rooted in the present, that it is a pleasure to trip up credulous believers in the unseen. This is a mood far more common than we dream. Even great men, who have had loftier moods, have indulged in coarse derision of the supernatural, as Carlyle in his taunting phrases of Hebrew old clothes and rags from Houndsditch; Matthew Arnold with his three Lord Shaftesburys, and Huxley with his challenge about the hospital wards, in one of which prayer alone should be tried, in the other all medical and surgical appliances. We must face the terrible fact that from him who hath not is taken away even that which he hath—the native instincts and resources which belong to him as a man—so that God—"the monstrous hypothesis of a God," as Professor Clifford called it—and the very possibility of a historical revelation from Him seem the most unbelievable of delusions.

Curiously enough preachers are apt to have two very opposite and inconsistent feelings towards this class, both of them quite unjustifiable, which have this mournful effect that they leave it severely alone. First they put down to mere self-will, to blatant love of wrong, what is an effect even more than a cause. Not all at once do men come into that position. Often lying deep below even unabashed secularism and blood-curdling blasphemies, are natures strong in moral aspiration, and endowed with acute religious sensibilities. But life has turned its rough edges to them, some wrong or hypocrisy has roused their indignation, and in the spirit of social revolt they have looked with jaundiced eyes at established faiths, and in their egoism have seen only the difficulties and seeming crudities of spiritual religion. There are a thousand influences in the life of to-day to fan such a spirit into flame among large sections of the working classes, such as the feeling that they can now retaliate for past injuries, the sense of growing preponderance in the counsels of the nation and controlling influence over industry. Their minds are filled with the passion for material good. In the enjoyment of their enlarged means of pleasure and comfort, they are jealous of higher restraints. Material ideals of progress engross their thought. They are passing through a stage, which they will presently surmount, when they shall learn from experience the limitations of all mere material good. With all their love of pleasure and mockery of aught beyond present good, they have not gone so far away as they think from the dominion of the supersensual. Loftier ideals disturb their thoughts, and break through their theories. Great leaders of socialism like Marx have sought to commit them to an utterly unmoral theory of life—the right of the stronger; —but even while they have nothing better, they are halting with uncertain foot, discovering a leaven of moral discernment which shows that quite another theory of life has a powerful hold on their hearts. These men are standing in the van, the future of the world is with them. If we discerned the signs of the time, we would not mind their denials, their audacities of undisciplined thought, even the vast incrustation of dislike, and suspicion of the Churches, and of religion itself which has grown into a sort of class badge among them. We would give ourselves to interpret their mind, see with their eyes, get into their confidence.

And then we would find that the other contrasted feeling which holds us back has no justification. Christian men have often an unworthy fear of bold and blatant denial, as if it had an armour which we could not pierce. Nothing could be more unwarranted. Get among them and you will find how narrow their standpoint and how defenceless they are on every side. They have not sounded the depths, much less solved the problems of human experience. They are simply squatters on the present, careless of the gathered wisdom of the past, or the vaticinations of the future, attempting to squeeze out of material good what it cannot furnish, with no clue to life's mysteries, nor answers to the deepest yearnings of their beings.

Turn now to the words of our Lord and see how, despite the chuckling sense of cleverness in those Sadducees, He read them like an open book. These were not working men, but rich leading citizens of Jerusalem. And still their dry-as-dust materialism has many types in the upper classes of our land, seared aristocrats, false cynical patricians of all degrees, pleasure-loving plutocrats, whose money is their God. These however are rotting branches of the social tree, while in the classes we have described, we have this frank materialism conjoined with virility, and power to make or mar the coming age of the world. What line does our Lord take? A singularly bold one, —twice over He says "Ye do err," "Ye do greatly err." This is sheer wandering away from lights which might have guided you. You think that you have trapped Me, but you have deceived yourselves. This comes from "not knowing" or taking account of what would occur to any reverent man. And so you have dishonoured yourselves in fancying there was any worth in an objection like that.

You do err, not knowing the Scriptures. You have shut out what the best have divined about the past. You have closed your eyes to the highest movements of unseen powers on the spirit of man. These loftier aspirations do not exist for you, who elect to confine yourselves to what you see—to the pin-point that interests you. But that is error, eccentricity. You are making yourselves—and yourselves in a light trivial mood—the measure of existence. If you begin by discounting the veracity of the human spirit even in its furthest findings, you are cutting away the ground of human knowledge, for you are discrediting your own. By all means examine, prove whether any particular beliefs have validity, but do not dismiss them to begin with because they do not chime in with your likings. Do not find a joy in belittling human aspirations, and befouling by light cavil, rooted convictions of the human soul.

And on what slight grounds you have come to this conclusion! You do not know your own scriptures. They are not the dead record of a stereotyped past, but the living word of a living God. If you listened to their voice you would see that behind the Word there is divine Power moving on to the fulfilment of a great moral purpose, passing from stage to stage of revelation, reaching out to a final fulfilment. We find such a movement pervading the past, but the same movement goes on into the future. Many things in the present are accidents which will be dropped out in the issues. Then the race being complete in moral and spiritual union, the physical ties of earth will fall out. In the resurrection they neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven. (v. 30). On such an objection as that, shortsighted and foolish, you have cut yourselves off from the highest men have thought, from the loftiest anticipations they have arrived at in all the past. "Ye do greatly err."

And as to the profound unfaith in a future life that lies at the bottom of the whole, that also is an assumption based on inadequate grounds, and contradicted by much even in present experience. Men live on here in influence long after they have passed away. Recognizing this fact, God in dealing with subsequent generations identified Himself with these men in whom His purpose took root and form, calling Himself the God of Abraham and the God of Isaac and of Jacob. Does God in the living evolution of His purpose identify Himself and His Kingdom with dead men—extinguished individualities? He is the eternally living One who has founded a Kingdom to lift men into His own life. And those who are with Him, undying potencies of His Kingdom, must live with Him.

This was more than a confutation. A profoundly luminous view was thrown around, not only the unseen, but the whole movement of revelation onward into the unseen. These Sadducees were believers in Scripture, but in a rationalizing spirit or rather in a study of the letter, they had become insensible to the life and movement of the word. Behind the letter of Scripture, Jesus revealed the living God moving on from stage to stage of a redemptive purpose. God was in and with the word reaching out to the future as He had advanced from age to age in the past. Still, when one part of His work was done, He moved on to a new plane, retaining the essence of the old, letting drop the surface elements of His earlier manifestation.

An adequate view of revelation as the word of a living God, killed an inadequate because unspiritual view. These slaves of the letter, who in torturing and twisting the mere language of Scripture to justify and work out their dogmatic position, had lost all living hold of the word, see what it meant to their fathers—the message of a living God which lifted those who received it into fellowship with the divine. Having not wholly broken with their ancestral faith these Sadducees are silenced, so silenced that for once the Pharisees rejoiced in Christ's work, and gathered to felicitate themselves on such a complete defeat.

That was a most testing situation for our Master, but He leaves a perfect example for us who are to follow. The argumentative force of His answer was shattering, but not content with triumphing, He greatened life, exalted God, illumined revelation and moved on to a spiritual end. His opponents were convicted of wilfulness and foolishness if haply they might turn.

CHRIST'S USE OF RESERVE

X

CHRIST'S USE OF RESERVE

We come now to a subject of some difficulty, yet which is full of light and guidance for Christian ministers when dealing with aroused conditions of popular feeling, and seasons of revival. There is nothing in Christ's teaching corresponding to the distinction drawn between esoteric and exoteric by some Greek philosophers. Pythagoras in Magna Graecia founded a community bound to purity and piety of life, but reserved the mysteries of his number-theory for the initiated. Aristotle lectured each morning to select pupils on abstruse sciences, and in the evening to a more popular auditory on more general themes.

Christ, however, drew no such distinction. Appealing not so much even in His profoundest teachings to a disciplined intelligence as to a spiritual nature receptive of the divine, wherever He found openness of mind He unveiled the deepest mysteries. If He spoke to a Nicodemus of regeneration,—to the Samaritan woman He announced His Messiahship. Round the inner circle of His disciples stood multitudes of the people, when He uttered the Sermon on the mount. Before a crowd of contentious Jews He spoke of Himself as the door and the Good Shepherd who gave His life for the sheep. Martha, accosting Him on the public path, received the astounding declaration "I am the Resurrection and the Life." The Ancient Mariner sings:—

> "The moment that his face I see,
> I know the man that must hear me,—
> To him my tale I teach."

And so, trying by the plummet of his own apprehensive sympathy each soul to whom He came, our Lord, according to a wisdom high above our thought, uttered Himself. He surprised Nathanael with a forecast of His ascension. At Levi's feast, when made aware of the murmurs of the Jews, Jesus spoke of the sons of the Bride-chamber, and the Bridegroom: and hinted the far-reaching and revolutionary thought that the new wine of His teaching would need the containing circumference of new forms. (Matt. ix. 17.)

He taught also immediate access to the Father for all believers, the unspeakable privilege of a life lived in contact with the Father, everything being done as unto the Father, alms being performed in secret to every eye but His, prayers offered to Him alone, fasting and loyalty to Him carried to the verge of suffering—in a word the give and take of an immediate holy fellowship pervading the common believing life.

From all which it follows that neither in the ancient philosopher's sense, nor in the Roman sacerdotal sense does this distinction obtain. The people are not kept in an outer court and fed with the findings of the inner circle; nor are they called to bow to the Church simply accepting what it is pleased to impart. The way into the holiest is open for all. "If any one will do His will, He shall know." (John vii. 17.)

One cannot travel far, however, in a study of the Gospel without perceiving, that—as with the prophets—there is a use of reserve by Christ of a very remarkable kind, and touching the very centre of our theme. This was one of His methods of dealing with men, and in regard to the fundamental issue which He came to raise, their relation to God. In this we touch the difficult side of the Gospel, the divine economy in the dispensation of grace. On the one hand there is an infinite fulness, a discovery of God as fatherly love, of the Son as a way to the Father, of an immediate life of love with the Father to whosoever may come, and of resurrection and eternal life following on simple faith. This Gospel soars to an infinite height in its provisions, and speaks in universals at every point when it touches human need, or unfolds for acceptance a divine ideal. And in the whole manner of the manifestation there breathes not only such a sincerity, but such a grandeur and intensity of divine purpose, as has made the communication of this loving message the turning point of time and the new birth of humanity.

Yet I find a most strict economy in the dispensation of this marvellous grace, not simply as a matter of fact through the hardness of men's hearts in refusing to respond, but through the form of speech designed and employed by Christ, and all by ordering of God. Take this short account of the matter by Mark (iv. 12.) "And He said unto them, Unto you is given the mystery of the Kingdom of God, but unto them that are without all things are done in parables: that seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they might hear and not understand, lest haply they should turn and it should be forgiven them." Along with this we should take the other great passages bearing on the same theme (Matthew xiii. 10-14; Luke viii. 10; John xii. 39, 40), besides keeping our eye on the facts of the case, noting how the parables bear out this view.

In endeavouring to harmonise what are apparently opposing views, one cannot overlook the fact that an attempt is thus being made to retrieve error which has had a disastrous influence on the spread of the evangel, and to bring out a whole region of truth, not only of great inherent interest, as showing how Christ's method is bottomed on basal laws of the human spirit, but fitted to give a new urgency and intensity to our proclamation of the Gospel.

To begin with, then, we must take these words as they stand in the full reach of their assertion, and in the plain meaning of the language. On the other hand, we cannot ignore the fact that they do not stand alone, but occur in connection with a discovery of a purpose of grace so universal and glorious as on a preceding page I have described. Further, having thus to deal with an antinomy or apparent contradiction of no ordinary difficulty, we must approximate to the full reconciliation which lies hid from us in the counsels of God, along such lines of fact and principle as Christ Himself furnishes, counting every step forward a gain, even if we should be compelled to cease far short of the goal.

The clue to a solution is to be found in that view of Christ's method which we have been developing all through these lectures. Christ was not a mere teacher diffusing ideas which He left to win their way, thus making contribution to the common stock of mankind. He was a revealer of the Father come to found a Kingdom of God, and authorised to raise a direct issue between every man and God. Yea further, with an arrogance that would be intolerable if He were a mere man,—He made belief in Himself the one supreme and final test of a man's submission or rebellion. Without circumlocution, or any softening of general theory, He made the soul's attitude to Himself the one ground of final judgment. "He that believeth on Him is not judged; he that believeth not hath been judged already, because he hath not believed on the name of the only begotten Son of God." (John iii. 18.)

But we must go further into this matter in order to be suitably impressed with the nature of the issue which Christ came to raise. It was not an issue raised between a man and himself alone, whether he would be saved, whether he was ready to undo the past,—although that personal issue was certainly involved. It was something beyond and more all embracing,—whether now that sinners had seen God as He stood revealed in Christ, and His gracious design to receive them in His Son, they would come out of the evil of their sin and yield themselves to Him, receive His grace and enter into His Kingdom. This was not a resolve that would be in time just before the judgment, as if it were a question of mere safety or escape. It is a question which must be settled when it is fully raised—for it means necessarily this, are you prepared now to recognise the claim of God, choosing the light which is come to you, or are you, in full view of God's light, to reaffirm your opposition? There is no loophole for delay. The only alternatives are for or against. And what liberates from, or rivets, the bands of condemnation, is heart loyalty or disloyalty to the light and love of God revealed in the Son. The whole man, what he fundamentally is, stands discovered in the trembling of the needle of his moral self to or from God. And that settles everything. "He that is not with me is against me." (Matt. xii. 30.)

If ever a preacher went for immediate results, Christ was that preacher. There is a passage in Luke which I read with unspeakable awe, coming immediately after that discourse in the synagogue at Capernaum which I have dwelt on at length (Luke iv. 23-28.) The scene is most vividly brought before us. The discourse done, there is just such a stir in the synagogue as takes place in any church after a powerful and searching sermon. Some are touched in their feelings, some are profoundly moved in judgment and conscience, some heart-whole but intellectually excited, say what a fine passage this, what a touching reference that. But there was that day One who knew the human heart looking on, searching to see what impression this message had made. I seem to see in His face the slowly mounting sorrow. He is verifying in His own experience a proverb that comes leaping into His mind. True is that saying as I find in my bitter experience, no prophet is accepted in his own country. They are all taken up with His wonders, are on tiptoe of expectation, feeling that they have a special claim on Him for such a vindication of His powers. "Ay," breathes out the Master, "you are all alive with the thought of judging Me, but do you know God is judging *you?* In the days of Elias He went past so many sealed in their torpor, and only revealed Himself to the open heart of the widow of Sarepta." Was He going to pass by them, and for a similar reason, because they had neither eye nor heart for deeper things?

What does He say in the first of His heptachord of parables recorded in Matthew xiii.? "Behold a sower went forth to sow." His words were seeds, life germs, that were for no good save as they germinated in men's lives. Let them lie on the surface and they would be taken off; they had to be received into the proper soil of fully open souls to bring forth fruit. Decision was a *present* business. There might be a few weeks indecision on the part of observers, as to how the seed received was going to take root and grow. But the moment the seed fell, it must be received or not received. How often did He say, "He that hath ears to hear let him hear?" He frankly recognised that there were many, forcibly repressing consideration of His claims. "Ye will not come to Me that ye might have life" (John v. 40). While others had definitely made choice of a policy of resistance. "Ye are of your father, the devil, and the works of your father ye will do" (John viii. 44). In a word, He summed them up, took careful account of their attitude, and determined His course by the degree of receptivity or non-receptivity which He found among them. He never allowed His consciousness of a limited—a very limited result—to interfere with, or damp even, His universal aim. He knew that He could trust the Father for some result; and as a Son, He did not seek to go beyond that conviction. "All that the Father giveth Me shall come to Me, and him that cometh unto Me I will in no wise cast out" (John vi. 37). Surely in all this He is a perfect model for every preacher of His truth.

And now arise, in practical experience, the difficulties, and, as meeting these, the considerations which have given origin to these difficult statements of Christ which we are at present considering. Where men have received His truth they must be carried further on. To follow Christ's figure, you cannot stifle a germinating seed. You must feed it with juices of earth and the air of heaven. Similarly, life in the believing soul is only a newly quickened capacity of living. It must be fed on truth and fertilised by the Spirit. Contrariwise, the non-acceptance, or rejection of Christ closes up and commits the man to a life of estrangement from Him. He has lost the key to the mind of Christ. He has dropped down into an alien sphere of thought and feeling. If Christ were by direct and positive statement to unfold the further course of His kingdom, first of all they could not understand it as Christ meant that these truths should be understood. But they might and would misunderstand, set afloat misconceptions which would hinder the progress of His Kingdom, and even organise on colourable enough inferences from Christ's words, oppositions of the most formidable kinds, which would create insuperable difficulties, humanly speaking, to the progress of the Gospel.

The Master's consciousness of His mission made Him none the less but rather the more eager when it could be attained, to minimise friction, to obviate the result of misconception, to neutralise hostility, and keep the road free for His spiritual mission. And in this practical spirit He acts on this occasion. Matthew has given the clue to His mind in two significant verses (xiii. 12, 13) "For whosoever hath to him shall be given, and he shall have abundantly, but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath. Therefore I speak unto them in parables." Verse 12 appears elsewhere in other connections, but it is equally in keeping here. Indeed we might venture to say that some such statement was necessary. Because it removes the whole subject from the ground of apparent arbitrariness, to that of spiritual law, in full consistency with the intensity and breadth of Christ's evangelical aim. This is a necessity forced on Jesus by the attitude of men, not an arbitrary limit imposed by Himself.

And notice the nature of the limit which Christ imposes. He does not become a teacher *in camera* and shut out the unsympathetic public. He stands in the common way, by shore or on the mountain side. To the very end He is always eager and ready for every receptive heart. But, surely with matchless skill, He embodies in a series of vivid parables the further teaching of His Kingdom, so as to convey its spiritual import to the spiritually prepared, without giving one hint to the unspiritual of the revolutionary external changes which would have to come about before those spiritual principles would be realised. If there was one spark of spiritual receptiveness in any one, these parables would awaken some echo within them, but if not, they were left blind to the full compass and issues of the divine teaching—wholly outside the spiritual evolution of truth to spiritual eyes. That was a fact—the result of the working of obvious spiritual laws; but it was also designed by Christ (taking advantage of these spiritual laws) as a necessity of the Kingdom. Matthew looks at the fact— "because seeing they see not, and hearing they hear not, neither understand." Mark is impressed by divine appointment in this. "That seeing they may see and not perceive, and hearing they may hear and not understand."

To fix these principles in our memories however, and to give them a wider scope in our discursive intellects, it may be well to take an individual case, and show from unmistakable practical results the necessity for such a use of reserve as is taught here. And to make the illustration as large and impressive as possible, let us take the catena of parables in Matthew xiii. Suppose that instead of these parabolic delineations of the New Testament Kingdom, so luminous to us, and with such a hall-mark of divinity on every line, Christ had made a positive dogmatic statement differentiating the new from the old,—He would have had Jewry about His ears, and would have most seriously embarrassed His own followers. For it meant the effacement of the hierarchy, of the sacrificial system, of the ceremonialism enforced with such rigour by the doctors of the law—in a word, of all the characteristic features of an exclusive Judaism. Scholars among them would see that the nearest approach to Christ's ideal—though far enough away—was in the Utopias of Greece. Every Jew would be shocked more by what he did not find there, than by what he did. What was absent was the whole shell of the Judaism under which he lived, what was present would seem to him a dream. Here was to be a Kingdom of the truth, which lived by the germinating power inherent in the truth, when in vital contact with God and the soul; propagated by perpetual diffusion, live souls being used to kindle life in others;—the living germinating truth, acting like leaven to leaven other lives; and then building the vitalized units into the tree of an articulated, growing and expanding kingdom. Living then as truth—a widely diffused, assimilating force, this Kingdom of God touched human lives in all sorts of circumstances, came upon them at unawares as a buried treasure, shone out as a human ideal, and in the far-reaching meshes of its public proclamation included a vast multitude from whom a separation would have afterwards to be made.

Had these been laid down in express terms as the lines of a reform which Jesus would inaugurate, there would have been contention and confusion on all sorts of side issues, appeals to Jewish patriotism, misrepresentation of ideas which they were utterly unprepared to fathom, whose outward form and manifestation they would necessarily misconceive. He left the outward form in which these ideas were to be realised entirely out of account. He did not even formulate in propositions the distinctive outlines of His kingdom. In parabolic form He cast out suggestions, held up pictures, before those who had received His truth or showed openness to receive it, which appealed to their awakened spiritual sense, disseminated germinating thoughts which would work out in actual life to their own realisation. All these parables are incentives to a life which has been awakened, to reach out in all sorts of directions, and to take account of certain spiritual factors present in all work for the kingdom. He speaks to the spiritual experiences and discernment of His own. The sower sows—truth must fetch others as it had fetched them and human nature would still stand to the truth in certain definite attitudes. The truth was a test of men and by their attitude to it would discover what they were.

Then among the germinating forces were not only the word but the lives that the word produced. But step for step with the quickening influence of consecrated personality would arise the evil one, disseminating tares which having a colourable likeness to the true,—lacked wholly its renewing power. Further, the truth sown had life potencies of assimilation and organisation which would secure success. You did not need to bring attraction to the spiritual. An inherent power, not only of drawing but moulding, resided in the truth itself. And further, it would so entwine itself with human life, and even with external circumstances, that forces which we cannot discern would work for its diffusion. Here chance circumstances in a family or a friend will discover to one a treasure of which he never dreamed and which he is in haste to buy. There, shining out in an ideal character, spiritual good seems to some the crown of all other good, which they are willing to forfeit that they may secure that prize. Still there must be continuous conscious effort to throw the net around souls, to capture men by and for the truth. Not that this will be an *ideal* or *perfect* process. You present truths, and must accept—exercise what care you please—the credible profession of men. You cannot follow truth, and witness its acceptance in the secret heart, or set up any infallible standard to try souls. And so you will have bad among the good,—who will be separated at last.

These parables are life-powers—like ganglia in the nervous system—minor centres of force urging us along the line of the spirit, guiding to the realisation (which the parables suggest) of the ideal kingdom; only to those who yield themselves to the teaching of Christ, and in actual service observe these counsels of Christ, will such a kingdom begin to dawn in actual fact, and to develop these characteristic features. Here Christ is simply following the normal laws of His ministry. He comes with a message of life to quicken life. His truths are life-powers to be actually realised by living them, and then through experience of action we attain to know, *i.e.*, inwardly to discern from the life centre at which we stand.

From all this certain main positions may be laid down regarding Christ's use of Reserve, and the understanding of the series of passages which we have been studying. Approaching this problem from the human side, and having respect to the forces which we have seen to be in operation—while recognising a divine sovereign element beyond our capacity of thought—we may lay down the following propositions.

I. That there is no discord, but a real moral harmony in Christ's mind between His eagerness to embrace all, and His use of reserve in speaking to His own in parables.

II. The explanation lies in fundamental laws of spiritual character, in association with the peculiar form of Christ's ministry.

III. He came to raise the fundamental crisis of time—to claim the personality for God; and everything hung on man's acceptance or rejection.

IV. By rejecting Christ's claim, men affirmed their former rebellion, went back into the coil of their old alienation, and became incapable of discerning from within, what fundamentally is a spiritual revelation.

V. In unveiling His further spiritual message to spiritual men, Christ chose the parabolic form as that by which he could convey those spiritual suggestions to the disciples, (following which they would go on to realise Christ's ideal), while giving

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no hint to the *un*-spiritual of the revolution in which this would culminate.

VI. In this way there is no artificial blinding, no going out of his way to limit or set aside some men's opportunities. Christ is following His own uniform plan of discovering spiritual reality to spiritual men, who receive and live the truth before they can know. Even for *them* it is better to see the step to be next taken, the counsel to be followed, than to understand all the issues of their action. On the other hand it is their rejection of Christ, their closing the eye to the spiritual, their immersion in the unspiritual that blinds the unbelieving. And Christ adopts the parabolic form because, since they have blinded and hardened their own hearts, it is most desirable in the interests of the kingdom that they should not *mis*-see, draw wrong conclusions, jump to false inferences, embroiling and confounding truth and error to the Church's infinite harm. Better, far better, that seeing they should see, and not understand, than that they should misunderstand. Reserve is a necessity forced on Christ by the unbelief of men.

There is a still further difficulty to be removed before we can be said to understand Christ's use of reserve, or learn to the full those practical lessons which such a subject is fitted to teach.

Not only is it said that Christ veiled his teaching in parables for the truth's sake, in order that the unspiritual might not be able to oppose and harass the Kingdom. In the original passage in Isaiah on which all the Gospel passages found, it is implied, as is also stated by Mark, that all things are done in parables, lest at any time they should be converted and their sins should be forgiven them. As if there were a positive aim to exclude them from the benefits of salvation.

These clauses also are to be explained along the line which we have already taken. It is they themselves who, by the rejection of Christ, have shut themselves out from any spiritual understanding of his message; and, as we have seen, Christ uses reserve as regards His further teachings that they might not use, for ends of hindrance and opposition, the truth which they had lost the power of understanding.

But there was another reason for reserve. There might be something in the further teaching which would create an unspiritual enthusiasm. They might come flocking into the Church to realise an ideal, which was not *Christ's* ideal. They might come flocking into the Church and claim the grace of God, fired with a passion for Christ which was not according to Christ's own mind. He had the greatest difficulty when on earth in obviating the endeavours to make him a king. Similarly in the times of the Crusades western Europe was carried away by a mistaken enthusiasm, urged by multitudes, of great religious intensity, but to whom the true meaning of the Kingdom of Christ was hid. As serving many subordinate ends that movement was permitted, but if it were not for such reserves in Christianity, Christ might come to be represented by men who were disloyal to His central aim. How many to-day would exploit Christianity in the interest of socialism, the civic church and such-like civic claims. The reserves that are not only in the parables but in the whole system of Christianity, however, absolutely hinder any such appropriation. And so they safe-guard the situation. It is utterly impossible that any should have the stamp of His grace and forgiveness except those who are in His secret and have come fully round to His standpoint and method. Whatever those unspiritual exponents of fragmentary and dissociated ideas of Christ may have, they have not upon them the mighty operations of His grace.

These passages then, in their utmost reach, *impose no limits on the grace of God.* They simply describe the devices of infinite wisdom for preventing the abuse and perversion of His message by those who have rejected His offer and cut themselves off from His grace. The universals of grace remain for all who are willing to receive, only God is not to be trifled with. He has raised for every human being the test issue. And if they do not loyally and wholly yield to His love, He will not let them toy and tamper with His message.

And now, has not this whole subject a bearing upon our work as preachers of the evangel? This is what gives Christ's life its imperishable value. Underlying every act, or measure, or provision, are spiritual laws inherent in man's being as spiritual, and in the spiritual universe of God. We cannot be too particular in the study of them. If we would know the nature upon which we have to work, the message we bring, the result at which we aim, the consequences of success and failure, we must wait upon these gospels until their secrets are discovered to our spirits. If I have indicated in the faintest way the mines of treasure which are to be found in them, this course will not have been without result in your lives.

PRAYER AS BRINGING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

XI

PRAYER AS BRINGING IN THE KINGDOM OF GOD

In this lecture we purpose dealing in brief compass with the necessary complement and completion of that magnetism of Christ, which has been the subject of the nine preceding chapters. The very end of those subtle methods of attraction was to awaken a response. In all hearty and living response there must be allowed place for the free expression of trust and love and desire and petition, on the part of those whose hearts have been won. The love which drew men must make room for the utterance of their love and for the fulfilment of their supplications, so that they may come freely, along the line of their individual aspirations, into conscious harmony of will and endeavour with their Lord. And so there emerges as a necessary consequence of the characteristic message and mission of Jesus, the great subject of prayer. In kingdoms of force and law, prayer is a rare and exceptional expedient, coming in to alter or set aside the ordinary course of procedure. In the kingdom of love, prayer is the vital bond between the child and his Father, the means of communication, the channel by which the whole being of the believer lies open to the inflow of the divine will and energy. From the human side it is the very law of progress, what we might call the soul of procedure, an indispensable element and condition of the renewed life.

We cannot, however, within the prescribed limits, deal with this whole subject. For it is vaster than we have seen, because the mission of Jesus went on the assumption of an abysmal sense of God in every man, and aimed to awaken that into conscious desire and supplication. And so we would have to consider prayer as the cry—in a sense the natural cry—of human dependence under the spur of need. Following on this we have the wide sphere of its activities in the spiritual life, the range and varieties of prayer, answers to prayer, and so forth. Then as touching for many the reality and fulness of the life of prayer, there are intellectual difficulties, such as the question of the possibility of prayer in consistence with natural law. Nothing could be more interesting than to pursue those inquiries. But for those who have proved the reality of prayer and its answer, such discussions are not indispensable, and there is truth beyond these, of immense importance to those who have become fellow-labourers with Christ in carrying forward the divine Kingdom.

We have seen in previous portions that Christ expects His people to be witnesses. The good seed are the children of the Kingdom. It is of the essence of His purpose to build up His Church through a ministry called, trained, and set apart. And sovereignly He thrusts forth exceptional ministries as He may see fit from time to time. Since then it is the Master's plan to discover Himself through human individuals whom He has drawn into the circle of His own will, there must be the closest contact between the servant and the Master, which from the human side can only be carried on by the intermediacy of prayer. Our distinctive aim then is to survey from every side the nature of this contact and communion in bringing in the kingdom of God. And as it will only be possible in a single lecture to lay down general principles, we shall marshal our findings under a series of main and subordinate heads. Such a subject cannot be studied to profit, apart from immediate consideration of the statements of divine promise.

We shall begin then, with some general considerations, designed to enforce upon such as may be comparatively new to spiritual work, the indispensableness of prayer, its central place in our whole activity, the original and creative elements in our work which are entirely owing to its continuous and powerful presence. As breathing is to life, so is prayer to spiritual success.

(1) In this region answer follows petition with

a regularity and immediateness hardly to be found on lower levels. We are not asking our Lord to do our will, but as those committed and called to His service, we are asking Him to do His own will and glorify His own name. Yea, the association is closer and more intimate. Like our Lord we should do nothing by ourselves. We should be in His hand to be guided, taught, energized. Yea, more, we should seek, before service, such close fellowship that we feel His hand upon us, thrusting us forth for this work. And therefore we should expect and look for and count upon answers. Of course the issues of all work are in the sovereign hand of God. But His faithfulness will never fail. We should expect to see signs following. For ambassadors to toil on without any anxiety as to what response God is to have from His testimony through us, shows in the messenger careless indifference to the results of his mission, insensibility to the needs of men.

(2) For nothing do workers need spiritual training more than for effectual prayer. Prayer is not merely a petition to substitute our will for His own, but always should come from one who has made God's will his, who mourns sin as an infraction of that will, and who longs to be used of God to bring those who have wandered back into accord with His will. This realised oneness of mind and will with God is the very pivot of the soul's assur-

ance, that He will come in power to work with His servants' words.

(3) Prayer, however, while in essence of this nature, is not simply a falling in with the divine will. In such prayer the believer's specific requests come up before God, and He is pleased, in the give and take of love, to exercise His divine power in the lines and measures of His servant's faith. "According to your faith so be it unto you." (Matt. ix. 29.) "If ye ask anything in my Name, that will I do." (John xiv. 14.) And so there is a human impress on all the works of the divine power. The human personality in the quality and range of faith is always a distinct element in the blessing or victory achieved. And so the human channels by whom God works, are identified inseparably with the movements to which under God they gave rise.

Having laid down these considerations generally to deepen conviction regarding the importance of prayer, let us now, even at the risk of laying down some things already advanced, sketch in outline the elements which enter into the practice of intercession.

I. In all such prayer there must be profound personal submission—the worker not only entering into God's will, but espousing it as the passion of his life.

Preceding any committal of God in answer, there is a self-committal of the worker to the will of

God. There must also be meditation, entering into rapturous apprehension of His will.

We are referring at this point to the prayer of intercession and that alone. The best instance of this truth is in the Lord's Prayer. (Matt. vi. 9-13.) Our Lord teaches us to pray, by bringing us before the Father and lifting us into contemplation of the essential glory of God, His name, His characteristic excellencies. How they are slighted, ignored, trampled on! Grief for this neglect, desire for the divine triumph make us pray.

And thus beyond any personal desire, before any individual petition, He draws out the child into a passion for the glory of the Father. Let Thy Name be hallowed. I live for this, but I cannot secure this. Thou alone canst affect this through the surrendered wills of thy servants. Hallowed be Thy Name.

Advancing from this expression of personal devotion to the very being and glory of God, He leads the believer out to pray for the historic kingdom in which the purpose of God is expressed, that His whole will written out in every phase of His self-revelation may be done on earth, as that will in its higher manifestations is accomplished in the celestial city. And then it is to be noted that personal petitions come in as for those who are thus identified with the will of God, that they may be strengthened and preserved for His service.

II. Prayer being the language of the new relation of sonship with the Father, the liberty of petition springs from the freedom of fellowship which He encourages in that relation: and the answer is from the spontaneous judgment of the Father's heart and mind, in view of all that He discovers in His praying child.

(1) Here we reach in to the secret soul of prayer. God could put everything in our way without our asking, as every day He makes direct provision for us absolutely at His own hand, and often without even recognition on our part. But in that case where would the son-life be, the liberty of the children with their Father, the self-revelation of the Father among His children—joying over them with joy and resting in His love?

(2) Jesus puts prayer expressly on that ground of the fatherly and filial relation. It is the son's asking—the son's sense of need that weighs with the father; it is confidence in the father which brings the son frankly and freely with every need. And out of the fatherly heart comes not only the impulse but the discernment to give gifts that are good to his own. That is the native property of fatherhood—"What man is there of you who if his son shall ask him for a loaf," etc. (Matt. vii. 9, etc.)

(3) But not only does Jesus explain this from

the ground of natural fatherhood. When as in His great communion discourse He unfolds the filial union between Father and believers in Himself, three times over He follows this up with invitations to the prayer life. The connections are most helpful for our ministry. In John xiv. 12-14, after asserting His union with the Father, that He is in the Father and the Father in Him as His works show, Jesus goes on to say, "He that believeth in me, the works that I do shall he do also, and greater works shall he do, because I go unto the Father." There was not time for the Father to show forth in Christ all the results of that union, since the Son was so soon to go away. But these would be shown forth in the human sons joined to the Father in the divine Son. And now for this high destiny the golden gates of prayer open; that the Father may be glorified in the Son through His people on earth is the fulness of liberty vouchsafed. "Whatsoever ye shall ask in my name that will I do. If ye ask me anything in my name that (thing) will I do."

So much for the privileges of the filial union, now note the consequence of faithfulness in these relations. The more we use our privileges the higher the felt liberty of prayer ascends. "If ye abide in me and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will and it shall be done unto you." (John xv. 7.)

But further, all the joy and comfort of their past visible fellowship with Christ was to be reproduced in the new immediate contact with the Father. You are in the travail hour just now, the anguish of parting is in your hearts. But all that will pass away in a new presence and an imperishable joy. "In that day it may be ye shall ask Me no question. But if ye shall ask anything of My Father, He will give it you in My name." The old free unrestrained converse of Master and disciples by the lake or on Hermon was being transferred to the throne and might be continually enjoyed from thence. "Hitherto ye have asked nothing in My name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be fulfilled." (John xvi. 23, 24.)

(4) And now as to the answer of the Father. In another connection we have already pointed out that there is no more beautiful exposition of the liberty and joy of spiritual religion than in Matt. vi. The children are to do alms, pray, fast, as unto their Father, dead to the inverted aims of the Pharisees. And as their souls thus blossomed out in secret to the Father's eye alone, the Father who seeth in secret, who can sound all depths of motive, and pursue every ramification of consequence, would reward them openly. Every answer would be a triumph of the divine Fatherhood—the perfect expression of His tenderness and wisdom, in the same way as in his own creature

place a good human father tries to meet the aspirations and desires of his boy.

III. But in prayer there is a more distinctive and pronounced element still, union with Christ for the express end of carrying out His Kingdom. Here in addition to filial relations to the Father we have what, without offence, we may call a business relation to Christ, because we are instruments for the execution of His purposes among men.

(1) All that has been adduced under (3) of the last general head applies equally to this further position. Then we expounded several passages to open up the fulness and importance of the prayer-life to which we are called. But it is of importance to bring out into prominence this fact that great interests are committed to our care. Christ has gone to the Father. As the Father sent Jesus, so He sent us. We are here to fulfil His purpose. Into our utterly feeble hands are put the carrying out of His works in pursuance of the ends of His sacrifice, yea of greater works in measure and outward result than He achieved. And so Jesus makes express definite and reliable provision for the fulfilment of our task.

(2) But Jesus goes further, in another passage He insists most impressively on His sovereignty in calling us into the service of the Gospel. Ye did not choose me, I chose you for this great work.

You can give no other account of how you happen to be engaged in it than this, my hand has been laid upon you. You remember how after a night of prayer I came down and one by one called you, and you stood there committed to a service, not which you chose but which I chose for you. (John xv. 16.)

Before drawing out further the teaching of this wonderful passage, let us revert to Lecture VI. in which we dealt with the subjects of our ministry. There we saw that the continuity of the Church lay in the continuous presence of Christ in and with her successive generations. He called the apostles for the exceptional service which in their day they rendered, and in like manner according to the needs of each generation, He calls those who may be His ministers to men. And what He says in this passage of the apostles, is applicable equally to those who are called of Him, and in His hand for the work of the present day.

"I have chosen you"—our Lord says. But more, I appointed or ordained you for a specific ministry, that you should go out into the sphere of my appointment, and bring forth fruit as I had determined, and that your fruit should remain, become a permanent and constituent outcome of the kingdom. And I did this, put you in such a position of definite responsibility, hinged the advancement of my kingdom on your service, in virtue of another consideration present to my mind, to bring into operation another provision that in your utter need you may have God to lean upon and that whatsoever you (so shut up and committed to my service) shall ask, He may give unto you. Thus we can go to the Father with an irresistible plea. Must He not help forward His Kingdom which He has sent Christ to found, for whose advancement Christ has chosen us and appointed our course? We come in Christ's name, as if in His place and charged with His authority to claim fulfilment.

(3) To complete our view of this aspect of the theme we may take the concluding part of a passage whose earlier section we have already studied. (John xvi. 26, 27.) He has been speaking of a time when spiritual truths shall have been made plain in His death and resurrection. Then He says "Ye shall ask in My Name." Prayer in My Name shall be fully established. And this will be the foundation of a close and full sympathy. Do not suppose that you will be kept at arm's length except and in so far as I may make request for you. You will have your standing and personal acceptance in Me, but more and more will the Father be personally drawn out to you for what of Me He has found in you. You love Me and are standing for Me before an unbelieving world. You believe that I came forth from God, and are

maintaining the Christian view before a world in the wicked one. Being knit to you, as factors in His Kingdom, forces for truth and righteousness, the heart of the Father will go out to you.

These are wonderful statements, and if we would be powerful witnesses, we must take them as actual facts, presume upon them in every plan we lay, reckon upon them as a manufacturer reckons upon the driving power of his engines, and keep them in meditation ever before our minds as elements which must enter into all spiritual service as they must contribute to all spiritual success.

In the particulars that remain we shall see from several points of view the scope of this prayer life.

IV. In such intercourse of prayer with our Father we can expect, that overruling all hostility He will make every event turn out for good, secure that every loss shall issue in a wider gain, cause every extremity to become the occasion of a fuller unfolding of His counsel, and of clearer forecast regarding the coming time.

There are several passages which communicate this vast confidence, but the most comprehensive is to be found in John xvi. 1-14. Under the following heads we shall bring out the chief points of this promise.

(1) In an irrational fear they were bemoaning

His departure. And so He draws aside the veil of the future to discover the perils of witness which lay before them. A visible human Lord would no longer meet the needs of a vaster arena and a more subtle and trying situation. "It is expedient for you that I go away," that this Comforter may come; and note in what respects His coming would advantage believers.

(2) Sent from the Lord to meet the new emergency, His activities can widen with the widening area of the Church. He can and shall fill the world with His witness. Then He has a subtle power of carrying the witness home. Working with the truth and every reflection of the truth, in character and influence, He can follow the truth into the soul, give it vividness in the deeps of the being, awaken every memory that might strengthen and support the impression, move on the will and so convict the soul, summon it to the bar of an aroused conscience, and win a verdict from the man against himself.

And this extraordinary power of the Spirit to which every human being lies exposed, as the earth lies open to the sun, is not confined to the tracking and exposure of sin. He can make the true ideal of man live before his inner eye, in the ideal righteous career of Christ. And more, He can so impress the man with the supremacy of right, and the moral issues of life that He will see everything moving on to a final judgment. What a power working secretly with the servants of Christ, making them powerful in their seeming weakness beyond all human measures. The witness of Christ would be revivified in the witness of the Spirit, and not at one point but simultaneously in myriads of souls all over the world.

(3) But beyond and above this as age followed age, the Holy Spirit amid the exigencies of each new time, in order to equip faithful servants for fresh opportunities, would carry them further and further into the meaning and fulness of revelation, guiding into a practical understanding as the need arose (v. 13). And so, while according to another statement, revelation is complete; "All things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you" (John xv. 15), yet in the sense of opening its fulness, defining its doctrines and applying its lessons, Jesus has had and still has yet many things to say, that we cannot bear now (v. 12).

(4) And just because the Holy Spirit is in the Church, carrying prayerful and believing men further and further into the heart of revelation—not speaking of Himself, but applying to life and need the principles of revelation, believers on the ground of these principles can so forecast the issues of the present that they have the clues to

the coming time. Christ shows them things to come. How true that is, for while an inert Church out of contact with the living God is the most stereotyped of all institutions, a spirit-quickened Church has fruitful outlooks and aspirations towards each new age. In her missions the Church woke to the importance of attaching the heathen peoples to Christendom, almost a century before the nations sought, by spheres of influence, to attach them to civilization.

V. But the testimony of Jesus goes further. Because these great words of His which we are now to consider have been diverted and perverted from their true spiritual aim, they are not to be set aside. He is not giving to an external and historical organization—in the sense of making over legal rights and properties; to have and to hold independently of character or spirit,—the blessings mentioned in these words. Christ gives nothing whatever on that footing. The whole conception is foreign to the spirit and aim of His gospel. He is showing how, where there is spiritual vision and capacity in his people, God is willing to lean on and commit His power to, and confirm and establish the action of, His people. It all depends on their receptivity and response. The Peter to whom the great words of Matt. xvi. 17-19 are addressed, is stigmatized as Satan ere the day be done. And the words about binding and loosing spoken to Peter, are at Matt. xviii. 18 repeated to the Apostles.

The principle of all such utterances is found in the divine willingness to commit Himself to the heart-whole witness of His servants in association with Himself. The nucleus of this class of statements is found in Matt. xviii. 19. Taking the church or Christian fellowship in the irreducible minimum of two—Jesus says "if two of you shall agree on earth as touching anything that they shall ask, it shall be done for them of My Father who is in heaven." Here it is fellowship, agreement on a God-glorifying aim that gives their petition its power. Because where there are two thus united for God's glory, there are three. There am I in the midst of them. (v. 20.)

And how far does that power go? Notice it is not a magical power which can be bought and sold, having a property value. It is not something perfect and absolute, but as befitting human agents, real, practical and helpful. We have to receive men and women into the fellowship of the Church. We have to commit bodies of believers by courses of action proposed, accepted, and executed, and these along many lines. We are called at times to dissolve censures, to relax restraints, break down limits, form larger fellowships than seemed possible or even desirable in an earlier day. Are all these responsible actions to have only a human validity?

No! In no actions are believers more distinctly conscious of the presence and guidance of the living God. "It seemed good to the Holy Ghost and to us," wrote the Apostles in their first circular letter to the Churches. (Acts xv. 28.)

And our Lord would have his disciples go forward to all such acts, conscious that God is with them in these; and as with single minds they serve their Lord they shall have their decisions confirmed and established. "What things soever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and what things soever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven." (Matt. xviii. 18.) In the same spirit should we interpret even the great passage about the keys (Matt. xvi. 19), and the other in John (xx. 23): "Whosesoever sins ye remit they are remitted unto them, and whosesoever sins ye retain they are retained." These are not miraculous endowments conferred on a priest to be wielded like a sceptre with autocratic power. But these are heights of grace reached by consecrated servants in which they can so interpret the mind of God to needy souls and in respect of their need, that their words carry an illumination and decisiveness that are final to the recipients. God has spoken for them, in his servants.

Surely nothing is more fitted to impress servants of Christ with the responsible character of their position, or to rouse and maintain a spirit of fervent intercessory prayer! It is under the spell of just such considerations that the common ministry has at times become a thing of stupendous power, and communities have lived as under the shadow of God. And marvellous to think, such possibilities lie behind our ministry every hour.

VI. We cannot understand the full scope of intercessory prayer until we explore another dimension. Some one was bemoaning to Daniel Webster the congestion of modern professional life, when he uttered the striking saying, "there is always room at the top." And so whatever be the vast scope of prayer, covering all the interests of a Christian worker, the chief dimension is upward. "According to your faith be it unto you." (Matt. ix. 29.) And more strikingly, "O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt." (Matt. xv. 28.) The more we grow in capacity, submission, love, we become organs through whom God can and will express Himself, not only in larger measure but on higher planes. True, God is sovereign through all this ministry of intercession. It is according to His estimate that the answer in open reward is given. Here is the supreme trial and testing of the prayer life, for His hearing, while of grace, is, in its visible manifestation, the peculiar crown of His holy judgment, electing to use us on such and such levels, and in such and such measures.

Instead of historical proofs which lie in numbers to our hands, I shall take one illuminative instance of this law from our Master's words. In perverse mood the Jews have been wilfully misunderstanding the most solemn communications of Christ. When He spoke of going to the Father, they coarsely queried "Is He going to kill Himself?" In connection with this we have a wonderful self-revelation of our Lord's inner life. (John viii. 28-29.) First we shall take our Lord's sense of the Father's nearness to Him. He that sent Me is with Me (v. 29.) Remember these were conscious feelings of a human heart, conceived in a human mind. They are not beyond what in feeble measure, and with some trace of imperfection, we may feel on our human level, though they are here associated with the surrender of the divine Son. They are drawn from Him by the cruelty of His questioners. Notice further the Son's sense of perfect oneness with the Father in voluntary obedience. "I do always the things that are pleasing to Him." And from the consciousness of a will perfectly open like a flower to the will of the Father, rose up the unquenchable sense of the answer which God would certainly give to a life that was a prayer, to the prayer of His perfect consecration. Look how He rolled it out over the quailing faces of His foes. "When ye have lifted up the Son of Man, then shall ye know that I am, and I do nothing of Myself." In that moment He saw the glory of His self-revelation, in resurrection and ascension and Pentecost, demonstrating His person and mission. On that level, to that height of power was God going to answer His faith. "According to your faith, so be it unto you." "If ye had faith as a grain of mustard seed ye might say unto this sycamore tree, be thou plucked up by the root and be thou planted in the sea, and it should obey you." (Luke xvii. 6.) But not only are the rooted forces of life within the dominion of faith, when God is pleased to honour that trust for His glory. Nothing shall be impossible unto you, not even the material frame of nature—this mountain shall remove to yonder place. (Matt. xvii. 20.)

And God gives even to men, who have come into this wholeness of fellowship, immovable confidence in the fulfilment of promises wholly beyond human impossibility. We have but to remember Abraham, Gideon, Jonathan, Jeremiah, Paul, and among the moderns, Morrison of China, Mackay of Uganda, George Müller, and multitudes beside.

VII. And now along this line let us consider very briefly the mystery of importunity. That we are required to continue instant in prayer is a fact of experience. And our importunate continuance is of such importance that out of His small sheaf of parables, our Lord devotes two to explain and illustrate it. These are the Friend at Midnight (Luke xi. 5-9) and the Unjust Judge (Luke xviii. 1-8).

In both instances persons go aside from their normal course—not readily but after some constraint; and in both cases what avails to secure this is the importunity of conscious need. In the former case, the exceptional element lies in the circumstances—midnight, the locked door, being in bed. These tend to hinder one otherwise predisposed to help. On the other hand in the second parable the difficulty lies in the man from whom help is besought. What is asked is that he go aside from a formed character to act against the reigning spirit of his life, for an end that normally would have no weight with him, doing justice to a poor widow.

Is it not plain what the *a fortiori* of this argument is? If a friend will surmount inconvenience to help one pleading and continuing to plead necessity, if a man shut up even to a wrong line of action will rise above himself upon occasion at the cry of age and misfortune, will not God yield to such importunity? Ay, but an objector rejoins, the need for importunity arises among men because of human shortsightedness and evil. But in the realm of an omniscient God should there be room for this?

The sufficient answer is found in these considerations. God has many kingdoms in the dispensation of time, and each with its own proper laws, the kingdom of the inorganic, the kingdom of life, the kingdom of mind. And so He has a common kingdom of providential overrule for men as they are in this world. And this kingdom has its own rules or fitnesses of things from which a wise ruler will not go. But if from some higher ground of purpose, exceptional reason or force come in, God may modify His plans. The great biblical instance of this is in Genesis xviii. 16, etc. God is moving on to smite Sodom. But He has in Abraham one who is working with Him to higher ends of the kingdom, and so Jehovah pauses and makes room for prayer to come in, if haply prayer might open the way to a loftier solution. And the reason was, God had in Abraham one on whom He could depend. (v. 18-19.) God is continually open to take the higher line if there are those pressing for it by whom He can carry His purpose out. What possible destinies have hung above individuals and nations, if faith had but prevailed? "And when He was come near, He beheld the city and wept over it, saying, If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes." (Luke xix. 41, 42.)

CHRIST'S APPEAL TO THE FUTURE AS A MOTIVE FOR THE PRESENT

XII

CHRIST'S APPEAL TO THE FUTURE AS A MOTIVE FOR THE PRESENT

We are bringing the practical aspects of Christ's ministry which we have been studying, to a focus, in this austere yet fascinating subject. Our patient effort to study Jesus as a missionary to His own generation, is reaching a natural termination in the subject of this closing lecture. However reluctant one might be, from inability to deal adequately with so perplexed a theme, yet it would be impossible to set aside the charge of unfaithfulness, not to say of moral cowardice, if one did not carry out to its unending issues the scope and burden of Christ's message. So far from being confined within earthly horizons, in the whole movement of His teaching, our Lord goes up and out to the unseen. He never overlooks for a moment the immense outcomes and issues of His ministry. As we saw in the beginning of Lecture IX., He came to break up the moral stagnation of the world, kindling the fire of conflicting moral ideals, as men drew to or away from His perfect example; gathering power in the hands of nations as they grew up into His light; by them effacing the lower and less responsive peoples, and turning apostate nations into waymarks and beacons, like the withered fig-tree.

That whole movement covering history is however but the earthly development of an influence and issues that are unending. The final issue of the human race is raised for settlement in Christ's mission. Human destiny hangs on the acceptance or rejection of the Son of God. Time ends in an irrevocable separation of righteous and wicked, in the righteous shining forth as the Son in the Kingdom of the Father. (Matt. xiii. 41-43.) And eternity begins in this manifestation of the sons of God and their association with Christ on His throne, to behold His glory and share His triumph.

If we approach this consummation from the plane of present fellowship with Christ, and the progress thus far of His kingdom, we find this to be a stupendous theme, overwhelming in its interest for the individual and the world. While implicitly received in Christendom, these teachings put a sceptre in the hands of the Church of unquestioned potency. Unfortunately, however, the materialisation of these truths, their crude and grotesque exhibitions, their unspiritual use, and the tacit introduction of human assumptions to fill out and coarsen the Bible revelations, have had the effect of raising a stone wall of scepticism, shutting out this whole region of truth from the serious belief of millions. The modern generations have suffered exceedingly from having been thus diverted to the pinfold of the present, and from losing that acute sense of the magnitude and unending issues of existence which marked some earlier ages.

What we want is to come back to the biblical standpoint, to recognise mystery where it still obtains, not to push the communications of scripture beyond their true import and bearing, and to be very earnest in seeking the point of view from which, and the lines within which these are to be viewed.

Now it so happens, according to our judgment, that ours is the standpoint from which we can see the native force and precise bearing of all these testimonies of our Lord. We have been studying Him as a human teacher laying Himself out to meet the men of His own generation, we have been content to note and simply open up, the reigning ideas of His immediate mission. We have unfolded the plane from which He spoke, the distinctive end at which He aimed in the case of every man, the lines along which He moved to the realisation of His purpose; and so from within the circuit of His own thought we can reach out to what were with Him the foreseen conclusions of His mission.

No more remarkable proof could be given, of the way in which general tendencies of thought, and favourite points of view can blind writers and speakers to the most obvious facts, than the way in which the predominant drift of the teaching of our Lord is being hidden behind side issues and subordinate points. Christ came from the unseen and was moving to an end in the unseen, through His whole earthly activity. This master idea interpenetrates the Sermon on the Mount and the septet of parables in Matt. xiii., no less than His discourse of resurrection by Lazarus' grave, and the great utterance at the table on the night preceding the crucifixion.

But further, working along the lines which we have sketched, we can see the immediate end of Christ in drawing aside the veil of the future. Those discoveries of things to come, are brought in as motives for the present. He would drive home the importance of present decision and action, by unveiling the issues of conduct in the world to come.

Without further preface, then, let us move out from the present so as to see where, and in what form, and to what extent, judgment comes in. We shall summarise under seven heads the main steps of the sequence.

I. Christ sent of the Father came to raise a fundamental issue in humanity, to create a crisis or judgment of opportunity, for the whole race. We have stated this as a leading issue of Christ's ministry in other connections, but now rapidly summarise it as a basis for what is to follow. This crisis of opportunity may be thus stated. Whatever the past may have been, if men are willing now, in view of God perfectly discovered in the Son, to accept this Christ as the way to Him, condemnation is annulled. The whole question of acceptance with God is settled, never to be opened again. And more, on the basis of that union, eternal life is begun.

Contrariwise, seeing that the reign of shadows is at an end, and light is come into the world—God being seen as He is—if men, with all their sad experience of sin, reject Him, the only reason can be, that, seeing the perfect good, they love the evil. By their deliberate action they write themselves down the men they are—lovers of evil. And since no higher or grander illumination can ever come to them, than they have had in Christ, the thing is settled so far as they are concerned—they are condemned already. If ye believe not that I am He, ye shall die in your sins." (John iii. 16-21.)

II. This issue is final as a matter of fact as well as of right—there is no going aside from, or getting past it. That must front every man to the end of time. And for this reason, in the great crisis or judgment of Calvary, Christ engaged and exposed and broke for ever the whole power of evil. Against the gathered force of human evil overwhelming Him, Christ revealed perfect love and holiness, thrusting the vileness of evil into eternal self-discovery, blighted with the blight of an incurable shame. But He did more. He discovered behind human sin a viler and more inveterate spirit, urging on the human to opposition, reaching out through only partially conscious instruments to the defeat of God's purpose and the crushing of God's messenger. And in the moment of Satan's seeming victory, by enduring the worst which he could inflict, He broke Satan's power, revealing the love of the divine heart and the glory of the divine holiness, in that sacrifice and salvation by which He opened a way for all men to God.

III. In this final issue all partial conflicts and controversies between good and evil are gathered up into one supreme opposition which includes them all,—the very essence and fountain of evil being confronted with the soul and spring and essence of all good. Now is the judgment of this world, now shall the prince of this world be cast out and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me. (John xii. 31, 32.) On this issue humanity shall take sides, and judgment shall be given. "Two women shall be grinding at the mill, the one shall be taken and the other left. Watch therefore for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." (Matt. xxiv. 41, 42.)

IV. In Christ's view, that issue has been raised through all the generations of the past not only among the covenant people, but among the heathen. The men of Nineveh had it raised by Jonah (Luke xi. 32) less completely raised, and only for a season, but when they saw the issue, the brutal egoism of their heathenism or homage to the righteous One, they repented. In the dark, men are going for what they know of right, or are yielding to self. And so when at the last they come out into the glare of judgment, the light of Christ will search them. They will find in Him the highest expression of that great moral and spiritual alternative, which, more dimly and confusedly, faced them, and will take their places, as, up to their light, they chose what they knew of God, or fell back on disobedience or selfishness. And so what Christ declared (Matt. xxv. 31) is strictly true. "When the Son of man shall come in His glory . . . before Him shall be gathered all the nations, and He shall separate them one from the other." He has raised the only question understood of all men. God has a witness in every man, the devil has a hold of every man. And further, He has raised the only question decisive in regard to every human being, to settle which he exists and continues in the world. Our increased acquaintance with all peoples and races through missionary enterprise confirms these facts. And so the newest thought of to-day vindicates the fullest teaching of Scripture, as to Christ being the universal judge.

V. From this standpoint of Christ as the universal Judge, the glory of His saving mission comes home to us with new and stupendous power. We might put the commission of Jesus to His servants thus. "Servants of Mine, I have chosen you and appointed you to go and bring forth fruit—Ye shall be witnesses unto Me unto the uttermost parts of the earth. But you shall not go anywhere, to one single man, where you will not find an understanding of My conflict with the evil one, in perfect surrender to God. They will know what it means, by the conflict going on in themselves. Well, I commission you to tell them to be of good cheer, I have opened a way for them to the Father. I who overcame evil in My own person, can overcome it in them, and will overcome it in them. I will give them authority and power to become Sons of God. And besides, I will bring them out into the clear light, where the whole meaning of this fundamental problem, and everything to which it stands related, God and man, time and eternity, duty and destiny, shall be clearly seen. "I am the light of the world, he that followeth Me shall not walk in darkness but shall have the light of life." (John viii. 12.)

VI. Christ's message then founds on certain natural facts of universal human experience (1) Man's free will and responsibility, (2) the witness of God in every human soul, (3) the conviction on their part of being accountable to the Author of their being. In view of these He unveils human sin, and the true standard of the divine judgment; and then offers to undertake the problem for all men, meeting God in His own sacrifice and bringing us in Himself into perfect union with God. His Gospel is not a philosophy, an ethical culture for the few, but a divine message for mankind, under the burden of their native and inalienable responsibility. Meet God they must; give an answer of some sort they must, that is the inevitable destiny fronting all human beings, and this is the Gospel by which they can be saved from themselves, escape the corruption that is in the world, and positively enter into the fellowship of God.

VII. But the truth is not simply that there shall be a final judgment and that Christ is the alone Redeemer in whom we shall be able to meet that judgment and be welcomed into the reward of blessedness. Christ Himself shall be the judge. (Matt. xvi. 27.) For the Son of man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then shall He render unto every man according to His deeds. The standard is a Person; the measure is the approximation of human persons, as discovered in the whole expression of their doings, towards this ideal. Temporal history has ended, the outward setting of place and conditions in this life is blotted into nothing. The hour of summation has come and all persons are gathered before the supreme Person.

Can the reader fail to see how that whole view gave urgency and point to His message and Mission? And when we go forward now to consider the great lines of His judgment of the world, we are struck by the same outstanding fact. He has no desire to indulge a curious inquisitiveness on our part, by giving us glimpses of the other life outside human conditions. He is thinking of the present, and how to arouse men in the present, and He interprets the eternal issues into a language of time, which may produce the proper moral impression. And He specially aims so to throw the net of judgment around the exit of life that every one shall be caught in His own special mesh of responsibility. Let us look at these views of judgment in relation.

(1) In the widest of all (Matt. xxv. 16), this plain all embracing issue is set up. Has the law of the common everyday life been positive service as unto Me, or unto others for My sake, or for what of My truth and love they showed in

word and deed? Or, whatever other elements may have marked the life, has that element been lacking—has there been no motive other than self, no unselfish love, no joy in meeting need, as having been visited with love, no perception that thus return was being made for love received? Can Christ find nothing akin to Himself, but only the pride of egoism, the wrong of self-will, the trampling lust of selfish possession, which are the curse of being, the soul of disintegration and division, and which fit their subjects for association only with the alien and rebel forces of the universe.

(2) But man is not only an existence, He is a potency. He has been crowned with endowments for a career of service, and there is no getting to the bottom of what he is, until you ask what he has done with his talent. Has this gift been a trust to be used for God, or a possession to be selfishly enjoyed for his own personal advantage? (Matt. xxv. 14.) This strikes deeper. Most men are ready to allow that conduct will be judged; but that qualities which are so specially our own, as our talents, our distinguishing gifts, on which we pride ourselves and for which we expect place and consideration from our fellows, that these should be looked upon as trusts, committed to our care, for the right and full use of which we are responsible, is a thought which does not come easy even to Christian men.

Those two first lines of judgment touch men as men, whether Christian or not Christian, equally applicable to both. Now follow two which have special reference to those who are within the Kingdom of God.

(3) The servants of Christ have each received a pound—a common dower of grace, with the command to occupy till He come. And so there arises the special question, has this gift of grace conferred on each child,—this common spiritual endowment,—been put to usury, and if so in what measure for Christ's glory? (Luke xix. 12-27.)

(4) What has been the goal of your existence? Have you gone on the assumption that Christ was going to triumph? Has His return been for you the goal of time which you have awaited with lit-up lives, fed from a living source within?

Such very briefly and summarily given is Christ's outlook upon the Future. He sets His gospel in that environment that it may come home with power. If we are to be Christ's ministers, we must hold that world-view—we must use all the considerations arising out of it to weigh with men. If we disbelieve all this, let us get us to an honest calling, and cease to juggle or play fast and loose with divine verities. If we are afraid or shrink from any cause, "we love the praise of men more than the praise of God."

To put the matter more widely, such is the great moral and spiritual issue to which the whole world of humanity is moving. We are in progress, not to extinction, or if to disintegration of the perishable, to manifestation of man's immortal part in the light of perfect being, that each may go to his own place in the Eternity to be. Such accordingly is our mission in view of that stupendous event, the climax and summation of time. What a solemnity then invests our ministry! What issues hang on its faithful discharge! When all other forms of human service cease, because their occasions shall have been utterly taken away, when the chief labours and triumphs of time are dissolved into nothing, the view of existence and the urgent concerns which we are commissioned by God to press, will stand out in solitary prominence, to mankind, dislodged from their earthly nest, awaiting the verdict of the Eternal Son, on which all shall depend.

In this closing chapter we are dealing with what is to come, with a consummation out of all ordinary experience, as unprecedented and exceptional at the goal, as creation was at the beginning. And I for one would encourage rather than deprecate the caution which ventures into such regions only so far as we are guided by unmistakable spiritual analogy from the present, and by express testimonies of Scripture. The spirit which builds great structures of hypothesis from insufficient and often ill-apprehended grounds, excites the imagination without strengthening and educating the spiritual life. On the other hand we judge it a course equally culpable and may-hap more dangerous to refuse, in a slavish limitation to present truth, to entertain well-authenticated statements of Scripture, supported by the whole drift and tendency of our present experience, which yet go beyond what we know.

For instance, one cannot follow the course of Christ's teaching summarized under these seven heads just given, without being convinced that they all hang together, the earlier implying and indeed paving the way for those which were to follow. The judgment unveiled by Christ, is manifestly adjusted to all that went before, being the inevitable outcome of the great new season of opportunity which He came to bring to the sinful sons of men. Let us teach these practical truths then as they stand revealed to our spirits, press these issues on heart and conscience, use them as motives to present decision, and we shall awaken an irresistible response in human hearts. This is the very fulcrum on which our message moves, that in this decision about Christ, each man is brought right up before his eternal destiny. All other questions run into this central and all embracing issue, and this, how I stand to God in His Son, determines all.

We have really nothing to do save to push that fundamental issue as the supreme truth of being. If we have authority from Christ for anything we have it for this. This too is no speculation, but an ethical fact to which our moral natures witness, and of immense practical importance. And further when, leaning on the testimony of Christ and upheld by the convictions of our own spiritual natures, we unfold these alternatives, we shall come to see the elements of mystery which envelop this whole theme. For direction and incentive a line of light falls as from the throne, opening up the pathway of the soul to the eternal goal. But when we would indulge vain curiosity, we are met on every side by impenetrable mystery.

The rough and ready assumptions of limited human judgment—which in recent generations have been so largely used to discredit and set aside this sublime department of truth—are unwarranted and unjustifiable. We must never forget that the issue raised by Christ, as to whether men will yield to God in Him, is primarily a universal human instinct and issue. Although man as sinful has obscured the witness of God within him, he cannot evade in some form, the question whether he will go for the highest good he knows, or for self. Christ showed Himself a world-saviour, because He struck into this central and universal instinct. He simply lifted that into light, unfolded its true scope, and brought in the redemption by which men might come to God.

Again, who of us can tell how far the light of Christ has travelled, and in how innumerable forms the rays of that light have touched into life this unquenchable moral instinct of man? Again the issue is the simple moral issue whether Christ or self is to be Lord of the will. And whilst we rejoice in the numbers who are unambiguously on the side of Christ, only God Himself can discern, amid the confusion and wandering of innumerable lives, what their drift and true tendency may have been. To step for a moment aside from our particular field of enquiry, Paul, superb dogmatist though he was, in great humility of heart draws what we might call a double line of circumvallation round,—not the Kingdom—but our imperfect human conception of the Kingdom. (1 Cor. xii. 2.) We cannot get further than this "Wherefore I give you to understand"—and here follows the outer limit beyond which we can not conceive a member of the Kingdom to exist. "No man speaking in the Spirit calleth Jesus accursed." Then He states the inner limit within which all are safe and at home. "No man can call Jesus Christ Lord, save by the Holy Ghost." But between these two limits, in this imperfect state, amid so manifold degrees of maturity and immaturity, it is not for us dogmatically to pronounce.

And then last and most important of all. The vast majority of humanity are on the other side of death, in another scene than this. At this point I would not be misunderstood. Let me declare frankly, and at the outset, I can find nothing to indicate probation in another world. But if not a scene of probation, that world has been, is, and will be a sphere of crystallization, where all the findings of time, clear and obscure, will shine out in their true meaning and proportion, and lives be developed out of immaturity into completeness, along the line they had chosen. And not until human history in both branches of which it is composed, runs out to the last sand, will the hour of judgment strike. Who can forecast the moral spectacle which the world of man will present, when the great mass from the other side of death, and only a remnant from the derelict ship of time, will on the last great day meet at the throne.

Do not mistake, I am not alleging these important considerations to draw particular inferences from them. For myself I have no pleasure in risky conclusions, but only in the sober well-grounded experiences of the spiritual life. What I want is to block out that effusive sentimentalism, which with a vast parade of superior spirituality, has discredited for millions the vital truth of the divine judgment, and the inevitable unending issues to which all character and conduct must come. The man who strikes at that, strikes at a corner-stone of the Christian system, and weakens the whole frame. We have not to do with this or that man's portraiture of the place of woe, with baseless calculations as to the numbers of the saved and the unsaved, with a thousand and one questions which it has not pleased God to unveil. God holds these in His own hand, and surely we can trust Him to vindicate His own honour when the time comes. These anxieties about what men so little know, these passionate protests against something which is so largely their own dream, these wild words against omnipotence—mere undisciplined outbursts of human feeling—have done untold mischief in throwing men back into a natural security; and in closing their eyes to that great principle of nature and of grace—the inevitable issue of conscience and of Christ—that "God hath appointed a day in which He will judge the world," and that they must be getting ready, here and now, to endure the scrutiny of the Highest and Holiest and be placed for eternity as that search determines.

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